A CREATIVE IMAGINARY FOR PERSONAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE EXPLORED THROUGH A FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY AND WOMEN’S TEXTILE ART
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I begin by paying respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, acknowledging their original and ongoing relationship with land as traditional owners and custodians. It is the land to which my family was transported as convicts in 1819, and the land of my birth. I acknowledge the yet unmet need for meaningful reconciliation with Australia’s Indigenous owners. In particular, I acknowledge the two tribal clans, the Dharrug and Gundungarah, the traditional custodians of my current area of habitation, the World Heritage National Park of the Blue Mountains, New South Wales.

In bringing this lengthy project to completion I am aware of the many people who have been involved, some very intimately. My dear son, Leo especially knows how much I have desired to bring it to fruition. The seed was planted as a research Masters for Social Ecology in his boyhood years, gestating into the shape it takes today in his young manhood. I thank him for his understanding in accepting and sharing in my passion and persistence.

The initial and foremost inspiration to enliven my life personally, and my work, was the knowledge and enthusiasm of woman elder in Australia, thea Gaia, for an eco-feminist consciousness through Goddess spirituality. GlenYs Livingstone’s dedication to and work celebrating seasonal ritual in place, in the Southern Hemisphere, has continued to remind me of the importance of the discovery of self through place, a consciousness that gave rise to the research process.

Without the participants, both in the workshops, artists submitting their artworks for exhibition, and visitors sharing their perceptions, the significance and value of women’s creative work in quilts would have been much less visible. My thanks go to all the artists for giving permission to produce the exhibitions on CD for the purpose of the research. During the process of the inquiry, I was also grateful to
the women who freely gave their time and insights to open the first four exhibitions: Dr Noeleen O’Beirne, Margaret Wright, Karen Fail, Cheryl Moodai Robinson, and friend and actor Annie Byron.

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Following a research Masters degree in Social Ecology, the University of Western Sydney awarded a postgraduate scholarship, providing the necessary financial support to further studies for doctoral research. My initial principle supervisor, Dr Kathleen McPhillips, was enthusiastic about the project until her resignation from the University. Thankfully, the enthusiasm was taken up by Dr Brenda Dobia at the School of Education at the University of Western Sydney, who provided guidance and discipline, but more especially encouragement to work through the final stages of writing and construction in order to bring the various aspects of theory and practice into a harmonious whole. In all its many stages it has been a process of creative communal patch working.
The work presented in the following thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original. Neither the research nor the thesis have been submitted to any other university or institute for the award of a higher degree.

Annabelle Madeleine Solomon

2010
Dedicated with all my love

to my son, Leo
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ABSTRACT

The research is an arts-based project that investigates the influence of visual imagery and symbolism on ways of seeing as ways of knowing: that is, their influence on perceiving and perceptions. It explores these interactions in deep connection to place – the Southern Hemisphere, specifically the mid-east coast of Australia, and outside the usual constrictions of Western religio-cultural constructs. Involving women in creative processes and taking a gendered position on experience as an intentional basis of knowledge formation, the inquiry aims to ‘make visible’ (re-vision) experiences of creativity as spirituality, usually considered to be invisible because individual and subjective. It suggests that the creative process offers the opportunity for unfolding an autonomous, self-defined consciousness of the divine in the world arising from relation to place, and experienced as an auto-chthonic, reciprocal act of self-in-Creation.

Three interrelated activities provided the material and mythical ground for the process of knowledge creation on three levels: the personal, communal and societal, all explored through the medium of textile art. The eight festivals of the Wheel of the Year revered by the indigenous peoples of Europe were personally re-visioned for their relation to a Southern Hemispheric cycle in a series of art quilts and in ten workshops for women in the creation of textile art through seasonal ritual for the Wheel of the Year. Four public exhibitions of art quilts were held to explore the cyclic process of Creation from another aspect: that between art as visual communication and its reception by the viewer (see Appendices).

Celebrating and re-storying prehistoric indigenous spiritual practices revived in and for place, and creating art intentionally has revealed a re-fabrication of spiritual consciousness: a new-archaic imaginary for creativity and spirituality as embodied and embedded in Nature’s rhythms. Experienced as cyclic yet transformative, the research revealed an original, personal engagement in the Mystery as a complementarity of opposites: the reciprocity of dark with light, of death as renewal, of self as other. It gave rise to perceptions that re-integrated culturally induced ways of seeing and knowing, through indicating the possibility of an ‘imaginary of re-turn’ to direct perceptions of participation in Creation: one identifiable as an authentic, autonomous way of seeing/knowing – where such consciousness is sourced by being in relationship, to self as woman, local Earth rhythms and All-that-is-other.
Chapter 1

QUILTING AN IMAGINARY

Figure 1: Quilt by Jill Vanderkoi, made for her daughter.
Each year at the beginning of December, as my twelve-year-old son and I drive our usual shopping route to Penrith, fluffy white snowmen made from cotton wool appear outside a house, lined up on a table at the roadside for sale. We become quite agitated, not so much disconcerted by their rather kitsch aesthetic merit as by the images so incongruent to our place on Earth. For many Australians of Western European descent, receiving Christmas cards showing snow-laden trees and rooftops may be a reminder of the old country. At this time of year such an image may be becoming increasingly irrelevant to the majority of us who contend with sweltering heat, and are always aware of the constant threat of bushfire.

Aside from the weather conditions, I asked Leo how we might make the imaginings and imagery of the Christian celebration of the birth Jesus, celebrated as it is in Australia in the full summer heat of December, more relevant to where we live. We agreed that even the insertion of Aboriginal people at the nativity scene would leave unattended a simple cosmological fact inextricably entwined with the symbology of the story. The celebration of the birth of Jesus in December in the Southern Hemisphere is out of time with what the story was intended to signify. As human symbol of a cosmic phenomenon, the return of the sun and therefore of the continuity of life, the remembrance of the story of Jesus' birth is out of time with the movement of Earth round Sun from the perspective of the Southern Hemisphere.

(Journal entry, December 2000)

Like many other children of his generation in the Western world, from an early age my son, Leo, grew up in the milieu of mass-produced, culturally-generated visual materials. He watched television from a very young age with its cartoons, situational comedies and advertisements, and played a variety of electronic games. This is not to say he did so unregulated by myself as his parent. However, there was the pressure from his peers to watch certain programs. Naturally, I was concerned about the influence on his young psyche of what he was watching, and the effect it might be having in forming his sense of identity.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to trace the influence of visual texts on the formation of culture, it is an incontrovertible contention presented in recent times that images are a major part of the ‘texts’ that inform and influence our perceptions of reality – from commercial advertisements to pop culture. If sight is
the dominant sense (Schlain 1991), then it would seem the images my son was watching were paramount in developing his identity, his understanding of the world and his place in it.

**Background to the research**

Another influence in developing the research topic evolved at a much later date. I entered into the present research project with various questions having been formed during the process of the research for my Masters (Sci Hons) degree into women using textile art creatively for the purpose of ‘re-imagining our spirituality and creativity’ (unpublished thesis, University of Western Sydney, 1998). In that project I researched and developed an understanding of the Wheel of the Year as an ancient symbol of connection to Earth’s creativity, as storied through the Divine Feminine, Goddesses of the early peoples of the Northern Hemisphere. Considering the significance of recognizing the seasonal changes was a powerful tool for personal growth, particularly as a woman witnessing the origins of the Divine Feminine in those early cultures.

My original research resulted in a series of art quilts that were created for each of the eight seasonal festivals, or Sabbats, according to their significance for the spiritual traditions of the prehistoric, indigenous peoples of Europe, those early peoples with Earth and woman honouring traditions (Solomon 1999). During the process of their creation, I began to see my quilts as an expression of Earth’s Creation, as expressions of Creation stories that for millennia were considered to embody a deep, inescapable connection with and expression of the Divine in the world, recognised in an inherent connection with Earth and her cycles as they give form to All-that-is in Creation. It became evident that this practice of an inherited indigenous practice that had been recreated by the women’s spirituality movement was ‘out of synch’ with my experiences of the seasonal cycle in the South. Yet the sense of heritage, of claiming identity through a spirituality

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1 The book of this journey into creativity through a European indigenous spirituality, which was originally published in limited edition as *The Wheel of the Year; seasons of the soul in quilts* (1997), was reprinted in soft cover as *Seasons of the soul: the Wheel of the Year in quilts* (1999).
indigenous to and born from its Northern Hemispheric Mother, became stronger as I observed the seasonal changes in my place of birth and habitation – and the sense of it inhering in my being-ness also became stronger, in spite of the tension that accompanied my realisations. One form of tension arose from living in a different hemisphere providing a different and opposing sensory perception to physical being and the commonly accepted realities that derive from inherited cultural observances, language and ways of knowing having their roots in the other hemisphere. The other source of tension in exploring an indigenous mind/consciousness that has contributed to the paradox of place and culture was the valuation of time, one that privileges physical duration.

From these points of disjuncture developed an understanding of all of Earth’s creations as expressions of participation in the sacred in our daily lives – in a different sense from the way I had perceived divinity acting in the world from the influence of my Christian upbringing. I had felt myself to be intimately involved in the world I inhabited through taking in the subtle changes in sensory experiences so that they enriched consciousness, enlivening a sense of self and land imaginatively. I had not only gained a sense of self-as-creator, descended from a long and populous line of archetypal Goddess Creators, but I had found an inner sense that what I created in fabric mattered – or, what I created in anything else for that matter, mattered. It mattered in the literal sense of the invisible becoming visible and having an impact on the rest of Creation – in other words, it was necessary, performed a function in Creation. I was co-creator in Creation, in agency with Earth – and the cosmos, for that matter! The word “matter” is etymologically connected to the word for ‘mother’ from the Sanskrit for month: she is a measure, originally seen in the monthly passage of the moon (and menstruation), bringing the ‘visible’ form from the ‘invisible’ in her movement through the night skies. I began to think about the interaction between creativity – the process of creating from the ‘invisible’ – and what becomes visibly manifest, created: that we are both creators and created, culturally and individually in symbiotic relationship, through our creative processes. And further, that femality
offers a special power, that women potentially have a special and uniquely embodied way of experiencing the relationship between the visible and invisible in the creative process through having the power to give life to another. This physical manifestation of Creation, together with the less obvious ways of creating through domestic activities, including the creation of ‘artifacts’ for ‘functional’ purposes (such as quilts), has been submerged culturally as ‘natural’, ‘mundane’, generally un-noteworthy and lacking any productive value. These had been fundamental considerations for the Master thesis on practical ways for empowering women in their spiritual lives.

Nevertheless, it may be possible to consider that female creative energy contains within the power to undergo a resurrection for the redemption of humanity out of touch with its role in the Creation, a vision that could come from honouring life over death, in respecting life on Earth rather hoping for and aiming towards eternal life after death. I had also started to see the Wheel of the Year not only as personally transforming but as a tool for social change, as a way of bringing myself and others into relationship with place: not only to bring our psyches into tune with the seasons as they are physically experienced in the Southern Hemisphere, but to bring them back down to Earth – that this place not only can be, but is heaven! From the realization of this possibility came the desire to explore the creative process in alignment with the seasons in this Southern Land, in my own art practice and in the creative practices of other women of European background. It was coming from an embodied understanding of my deep involvement in the Creation Story, in particular Earth’s story, and need to be allowed to take responsibility for our part in it. With the passing of each season my awareness of our participation as co-creators in this sacred process became more tangible, while at the same time realising that it did not form ‘a match’ with existing stories about our place on Earth, some of which are outlined in the following paragraphs.
The research as originally proposed

When the research proposal originally began to take shape, many of the above considerations had not yet arisen or fully taken shape in my consciousness. The original title for the proposal for the research was: ‘Creativity as sacred process for women in the recovery of indigenous spirit/consciousness.’ With the creative process according to the Wheel of the Year as the focus, the central theme that I initially wanted to explore was that of the sacred as a personal spirituality and expressed through our creativity. I had had a strong experience whilst creating the quilts for the Masters of engaging in ‘sacred art’. I felt that the way to recovering a sense of participating in the sacred through visible creative acts of making art could help reinstate the sacred birthright of women to represent the Mystery through the ability to create life through her body as the way for the recovery of a sense of self as participating in the sacred through creativity, such as was recognised by the indigenous peoples of Old Europe. As well as suggesting recognition of the embodied creative self I had thought of the term ‘indigenous consciousness/spirit’ in reference to a ‘coming into place’ for women of European descent. As suggested by the opening story, the use of the incongruent symbol of snow in the height of an Australian summer is an ineffective means for creating embodied experience for re-inventing the Christmas story. However, an embodied sense of place could be re-visioned and re-storyed for the Australian context through ritualized attention to the seasonal cycle. That is, experiencing a divine self as embodied source evoked by relationship to place celebrated as the Wheel of the Year as adapted from spiritual practices of the early indigenous peoples of Old Europe.

While the research was originally seen as approaching a reclamation of an indigenous mindset of European ancestors, I have come to realise that the use of ‘recovery’ and ‘indigenous consciousness’ are terms that may misdirect focus from the main intention: to explore the possibility of creating a self-authorised, contemporary spirituality with focus on the Divine Feminine, and experienced in place. In seeing the Wheel of the Year as a vehicle for discovering an emerging
sense of self arising from connection to place, in this case authenticated through engaging in creative acts with fabric, any sense of ‘reclamation’ gained is seen as an auto-chthonic act that is available to all in a contemporary context. The word ‘recovery’ seemed to position the theoretical direction of the thesis as retrospective - the study and analysis of past storyings of the Sacred Feminine in Goddess inclusive cultures. From the Masters research I had become aware of the understandings of early human spirituality uncovered by the scholars of the women’s spirituality movement since the 1970s, as Earth-based and matrifocal (Baring and Cashford 1993, Christ 1996, Gadon 1989, Gimbutas 1974, 1989, 1991, Spretnak 1982). Mary Daly’s (1994) deconstruction of the inherent power of words has the word ‘recovery’ meaning to cover over again. Neither of these paradoxical definitions provided information about the direction I wanted to take in the research. While the material of the research methods envisage ways of re-connecting for inspiration and empowerment to the ancient cultural threads of a matristic or matri-focal past, I saw the emerging focus to be rather the construction of ‘a new sensibility – of that which gives birth to possibilities, which is difficult to control, which does not serve hierarchical ordering’ – the past existence of which has been ‘fiercely denied’ and perhaps continues to be contested (Spretnak 1982 p.398). This act of denial suggested by Spretnak implies the need for a new imagining for a cultural consciousness that works through creatively reclaiming the Divine Female, envisioned for the present, experienced in relation to place; namely to re-connect with the power of our own, personal subjectivity as embodied women living in the Southern Hemisphere in

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2 While I am aware of the use of the word ‘autochthonic’ in anthropological and cultural studies, and more recently in post-colonial contexts, here I am using it in the more literal sense of its two parts, ‘self’ and ‘Earth/place’ by inserting a hyphen. In this form it is intended to set the context for exploring understandings of self as they evolve in the present, self-generated from connection to Earth as it is being experienced in relation to place – specifically in the current context, the Southern Hemisphere. In Chapters 4 and 5 I use the term ‘indigenous spirit/consciousness’ with reference to an exhibition titled re-fabricating our indigenous spirit. For this exhibition I sought to elicit creative works exploring a sense of what I have elsewhere in this thesis described as autochthonic, self-generated in relation to local Earth-place. The term ‘indigenous consciousness/spirit’ is used here for authenticity of the research material. Readers should be aware that in using the term ‘indigenous’ in these contexts I do not intend to refer to an Indigenous Australian Aboriginal sense of place, but rather to the use of the creative process to help bring about a more authentic sense of connection to this place.
the 21st century. It became clear that imagination and creativity through organic acts of creation were to be central to the process of preparing, implementing and integrating the means of investigation as a methodology, as the methods used and as a means for analysis.

**Ways of seeing: through story, image and imagination**

This thesis is about ways of seeing. I had been ‘seeing’ that ways of seeing the planet, the world and ourselves in it are constructed by images, verbal and pictorial, having the potential to form belief patterns, call existing perceptions into question, and in turn construct perceptions of self in relation to the environment and the other. If these stories that express viewpoints do in fact have that power, then it seems possible that spinning a different story, imagery and imagining would have the power to transform existing perceptions.

If the foundation for cultural storying is the interaction between experience and imagination, which creates and gives expression to our ways of seeing represented in cultural premises and practices, different images may offer alternative ways of seeing. Perceptions formed within a dualistic paradigm have created stories and ways of being resulting in a sense of alienation from the body, in which images of women have become stereotyped and the body objectified and commodified. Earth is seen as a place of dislocation from our true destination and otherworldly goal, where we have little power to cause change or participate in the way it is going, except for those who operate through power and domination. And finally that there is the superior way of knowing and understanding our reality that is disembodied, abstract and monocular. The premise of this thesis is that images can change perceptions of such a monodimensional way of seeing that both supports and is supported by dualistic, stereotypic and hierarchical dominator perceptions of reality. Nevertheless, stories, imagination and images can transform perceptions and offer visible means for ways of being in the here and now through creatively connecting with contexts, through being in relationships that recognise and value reciprocity, that
are multidimensional and diverse. Perhaps it might be possible to conceive stories anew in a different place, through those physically transposed to a different hemisphere, the Southern Hemisphere.

**Story 1: Creation stories and the sacred**

Creation stories abound in all cultures, are transformed into images, sometimes vice versa, and whichever way they occur, infect imaginations and ways of seeing self and self in the world. Although it is not the intention to provide detail analyses of cultural and religious Creation stories here, for many people for many centuries they have been fundamental to a sense of identity and inform the imagination about possibility through creative interaction with other ways of seeing, especially since they are derived from ‘divine revelation’. However, unquestioning acceptance of these stories and beliefs can only result in the continuance of ways of seeing that reinforce domination by some groups over others through gender, of the individual over community, and of mind over body and the Earthbody through knowledge systems in particular, as the status quo.

The creation stories of the Abrahamic religions rest on the underlying assumption that Creation happened once – some are very specific about when, presenting a linear process towards completion, and for some believers to occur at a specific point in time. Foundational stories of this type continue to inform ontological frameworks, in particular eschatological imaginings of a ‘final coming or return’ that remain prevalent theories of religious revelations, believed to be a divine direction by their communities and individuals. By these reckonings, participation in Creation, the ability to alter or intervene is out of our hands, except in a secondary manner by obedience to authorities that represent the creator. Our only means of participation is that we are on a path with the Creation as it progresses towards the final stage: the ‘afterlife’. Contingent on this belief is that Earth is a place of alienation, of ‘exile’ until another goal is reached following death; and that, ultimately the responsibility for our actions in this life is to be reckoned for and rewarded in the next. Stories of a heavenly place after death for
the elect are projected in religious artworks to some vanishing point beyond the horizon that has the eye looking beyond our earthly home to a heavenly unknown. Such religious imagery that informs our imagination comes from traditions established in the Northern Hemisphere, constantly being reinstated by new migration to this South Land. Even the texts we read describing ways to make sacred ritual to celebrate Earth’s seasonal cycles of Creation seem unaware of the bipolar nature of the seasons, thereby unintentionally reinforcing dualistic perceptions of alienated opposites. The challenge may be to see the Creation stories passed on to us through cultural succession from another part of Earth as complements rather than opposites – and create our own stories to augment the complementarities.

While it can be said that there is a greater awareness of the way ecological and environmental changes may be occurring as a result of human intervention - ‘humankind can now be seen as a force of nature,’ Al Gore declared in his documentary film, *An inconvenient truth* (2004), I wonder how this split between the socio-religious stories of Earth as a waiting place which can be ‘wasted’ or made use of, and other perhaps more personal perceptions of a connection to the sacred through sustaining Earth’s viability as home for all her inhabitants, might be re-storied to heal this split. Where can we look to find a different story for the sacred in Creation and our participation in it?

**Story 2: Perceptions of woman as Creator**

While many earlier Creation stories have positioned woman with the pre-emptive role of creative source, in later stories it is the man of ‘genius’ who performs the sacred act of Creation – the one who creates in isolation, ‘out of nothing’ (Battersby 1989). Woman has been storied as the recipient of and receptacle for the ‘spark’ of life bestowed by the male from a male God. She is no longer creative, but simply ‘reproduces’, replicates the species. The imaginations engendered and imagery produced by these stories has served to centralize a masculinist archetype as perfect creator and anthropomorphised the God Creator
as necessarily male. As a corollary to this story, the stereotype of the male genius in art came into being, a secondary creator who made images that had the viewer’s physical eye transfixed to a vanishing point beyond the horizon as the desirable spiritual destination, towards a place of perfection where participation in Earthly Creation was no longer necessary.

Defining religion as ‘the soil of culture, in which the belief systems, the stories, the thought-forms upon which other institutions are based [and] are consciously or unconsciously grown’, Starhawk (1990, p.72) tells us that in order to bring into form a new vision we have to see new images of religion in context. The formal, institutionalized religions that have been acculturated largely by and for a patriarchal mindset have set the context for spiritual experiences wholly in the domain of ‘the father god who created heaven and earth through his word’ – not his body, so that ‘he is beyond his creation not within it’ (Baring and Cashford 1991, p.40). Participation in the sacred is experienced through ‘sacrifice’, which these days implies suffering through exclusion, anything from negation through to violence – to self or other. The word ‘sacrifice’ means literally ‘to make sacred’, which Judy Grahn (1993, p. 257) theorises was effected through the menstrual blood of woman, and was eventually replaced by a shift in blood sacrifice that enshrined the ‘conceptual’ (rather than embodied) ideology of the male as it is expressed in the incompatibility, lack of complementarity of dualities, that take their meaning when seen in the abstracted framework of a dominant and dominating order where inclusion is only available through an acceptable alterity as defined by the dominant order.

Following studies in women’s spirituality, I began to see how the originating trans-historical and trans-cultural archetype of a Great Goddess Creator had become reduced in dimension to an historical stereotype that has functioned to suppress the creative powers of women – as well as reducing the power of men to include passionate stories of relationship, context and place, inclusion and reciprocity, stories that are life-affirming. So long associated stereotypically on
one side of the dual dichotomy - with mortal body, earthly life, fearful darkness, the unknown and unknowable, the challenge remains for women (and men) to retrieve and emancipate the creative powers of female archetypes. By re-creating meaningful archetypes in story and image it may be possible to transform the established network of practices, to foster a vision that can ‘challenge our imagination, our capacity to envision new possibilities for social existence’ (Levin 1988 p.285). Understanding the role of female archetypes as they operate in invisible ways in our lives contains the possibility of reclaiming and making visible the powers of our womanbody, acknowledging the powers of the Earthbody and re-forming associations with ways of being that nurture personal wholeness here on Earth. Contemporary Goddess spirituality offers perhaps more than a ‘return’ to archetypes that have been lost, but a re-creation of them for the context of our lives, times and place, which Mary Daly named ‘a new time and space of feminist existential self-realisation,’ in which creation originates from a ‘deep Source of creative integrity’ that is parthenogenetic (Daly 1991, p.111).

**Story 3: Identity as alienation from the body, woman’s and Earth’s**

Although familiar with some of the stories institutionalised as divine revelation by the monotheistic religion of Christianity, in which I was raised, I grew up not having the ability to see the themes, nor the interface between them. I was especially familiar with the ‘Adam and Eve’ story, providing the framework for cultural stories fostering the body as primary cause of disconnection and dislocation from an unknown idyllic place of origin, in particular the body of woman. I was familiar with stories bewailing our fate at having to live in this ‘veil of tears’, the ‘paradise lost’: stories explaining how the body – Earth body and humankind had been excluded from having a creative role in the unfolding Universe Story of Creation. As noted earlier, responsibility for Creation has been wrested from the hands of the individual, whereby the most important rationale for behaviour is motivated by what happens to us after death. The effect is to
reinforce identity gained through denying the body, human and Earth’s, especially intensified through their patriarchal alignment to the female body.

Overtime, and from my own lived experience as girl, woman and mother, I came to see the connection being promoted between the need for social order and the so-called imperatives of biology – with the latter coming out second best. I took it at face value that women’s bodies in particular were responsible for the difficulty in associating with the sacred in a completed Creation, and had certain biologically driven tendencies that were part of a ‘natural’ order they were at the effect of, and clearly unable to resist by their very nature. From this perspective, biology and social order became fused, and all other facets of the body-mind-spirit spilt reinforced. It took some time to realize that my sense of disassociation from my body as ontologically integrated with experience was not self-induced, but came from a far older, much more complex web of human inspired stories – and that I had the potential through that integration of body-mind-spirit and my place on Earth body to change those stories. Nevertheless, the question remained: if synaptic and muscular patterns become automatically generated as a result of biologically and socially imposed interpretations of reality that organize the body’s capacity to experience, how do we unlock the creativity of the body and relate to other bodies (including Earth’s) in responsive ways? Or, how do we foster a new ontology of sight in which being is the process of becoming?

**Story 4: Ways of [g]nowing and personal subjectivity**

In the last five centuries of Western thinking the separation between science and religion has slowly become an invisible yet tangible barrier, only recently prised open by a different perspective envisioned by quantum theorists. The process of separating the knowledge gained form scientific knowledge and religious belief has resulted in such great divides in the human narrative as the scientifically observed evolutionary thinking of Charles Darwin and its rejection by

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3 I deliberately used this neologism of ‘knowing’ in my Masters thesis to indicate alternative ways of gaining knowledge, requiring a consciousness that is open to intuition while maintaining a balance with the rational (see Solomon 1999, p. 95, footnote #5). Its use is explained more fully on p. 88 in relation to methodology.
'creationists'. We are used to hearing the story of knowledge being gained through dispassionate, clinical observation by a disinterested, impartial observer; of objective ‘fact’ or ‘absolute certainty’ over subjective ‘opinion’, of rational thought and irrational emotion. It seems to have become the ‘generic’ means by which the gaining of knowledge is authentically gained. It is also clear which of these ways of knowing is value-added, since accepted bodies of knowledge are written, interpreted, conserved and protected by a monadic system in which the commitment to detached objectivity is the only legitimated method by which authentic knowledge is understood to be gained. Nevertheless, it can been shown that much of what we learn results from physical experiences and is acquired at an age before our faculties of critical resistance have even started to develop. The monadic story tells of objectification and abstraction of such experience (Levin 1993).

With the growing suppression of certain perceptions about ways of knowing, came another knock to the wedge between the sacred and profane: the sacred becomes further disembodied and aligned with invisible spirit, further disenfranchising concrete embodied ways of knowing that included knowledge gained through the experience of emotion, intuition or passionate involvement, which were allocated to the realm of matter/non-spiritual/non-sacred. The separation between ‘pure’ knowledge, perceived as an abstraction of the material form, was re-built on its Greek foundations. Power relations between the sexes were enforced by ways of seeing that valued autonomy and independence, so that conforming ‘worldviews’ perceived the formation of relationships in a dominator model, necessarily set within an hierarchical order. Subjectivity as a means for gaining knowledge was again viewed through a monocular lens, and therefore invisibilised. Visual images in art reflected this view in the invention of perspective, using linear directions to point towards a fixed vanishing illusionary infinity, where the ‘Ultimate Subject’ might be found (Schlain 1991).
The corollary to this story, the one about searching for the ‘real’ authentic self through attention to an *inner* life, somehow divorced from and superior to the external manifestations, is another that serves the systemic monadism. It is a story that again never quite reveals a means to the end, although one fashioned for us to listen to for guidance in order to emulate. It took most of my life to realize that the listening required was to abstract moral principles that deny the validity of the body through its capacity to ‘listen’, the body which has been storied as finite and therefore not sacred. We need stories of the body that we can relate to as women, telling of their different self-experiencing processes – a subjectivity without the dualism of inner and outer worlds, while acknowledging the phenomena of social domination and monadic or self-replicating systems that demand a subjectivity without any understanding of how to experience its own reality.

I remember that it was a major turning point for me personally when I first came across the idea of woman as Prime Creator as I was turning into my fifth decade. Although I was becoming familiar with the theorizing of feminist scholars that accounted for and storied the marginalising of women over millennia by the patriarchal thrust, questions still arose. Why did I not know that ‘once God was a woman’ (Stone 1990)? Why had I not heard of the mass murder of women in the times of the Inquisition in the process of stamping out the understanding of woman’s role in sacred creation (Starhawk 1982, Llewellyn Barstow 1994)? As I read Huston Smith’s (1994) ‘guide to our wisdom traditions’, I wondered why he did not include a chapter on the spiritual significance of Goddess mythology and spirituality for ‘primal’ peoples, or the Wheel of the Year as integral to the spiritual practices of indigenous cultures of Old Europe? And I wondered about change – how to see differently if we cannot see, or are prevented from seeing from an alternative perspective? Where will these changes in our understanding of our identity come from – how will they be created?
It is not difficult to imagine the interaction between each of these ways of seeing: how each of these perceptions and worldviews build on and inform each other. For some time I had been noticing how these stories had seeped deeply into my consciousness and sense of self, and the larger picture of the power of these stories in forming perceptions and consciousness is inescapable. Together they ironically form inseparable layers of a perception that is both dualistic and monocular, that breeds a monadic subjectivity and maintains a monoculture with monadological vision, one that reproduces amoeba-like. A mono-dimensional foreground has the propensity to lock in objectification and alienation.

I have offered a very brief overview of what may be considered traditionally inherent ways of seeing in order to create the context for considering the central themes and aims of the research: to experience our personal creativity as participating in the sacred process of Creation in relation to All-that-is-Other⁴; and, as peoples transposed from another hemisphere, to ‘arrive’ physically, and particularly psychically, into place? How would it ‘look’ to experience ourselves thus? Could the Wheel of the Year, re-visioned for the Southern Hemisphere, be a vehicle for exploring such experiences?

**Questions arising**

In considering the purpose of the research as personal and social transformation by creatively ritualizing the seasonal celebrations, and creating art during the process, it became apparent that there were very real, entrenched problems associated with the notion of re-visioning an imaginary, and perhaps some unimagined questions that might need attention before setting imagination on the road of awareness, possibility and transformation. The questions arose as I thought about the cultural stories that had formed my early perceptions in relation

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³ In using this term, I intend to suggest inclusion of animate and inanimate, visible and invisible forces that are in Creation, of ‘existing in a world made up of multiple intelligences… that every form one perceives… is an experiencing form, an entity with its own predilections and sensations, albeit sensations that are very different from our own (Abram 1997:10-11). Discussing relationships of power, Starhawk (1990) writes of ‘Other’ as that which is made invisible by ‘the dominant description of reality’, which is also inferred in my use of the term ‘other’.

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to the Wheel of the Year, the focus of my previous research. For this turn on the Wheel I wanted to cross another horizon from personal transformation to having the Wheel provide a focus for social change. Questions such as these, contain within layers of meaning that intertwine and are connected by fine threads, and arose from these considerations:

- How can we reinvent stories of the sacred in Creation that come from our own experience of creativity?
- Where does our creativity come from – and our desire to create?
- How does our creativity impinge on our sense of self, and our identity in place?
- Can women’s subjectivity be fore-grounded, so that her stories can be heard?
- How can subjectivity be uncovered, beyond the stereotype in the image of a specific archetype?
- Are stories, images and symbols a powerful means for reinventing, creating a new imaginary for ourselves and for others?
- How is authenticity in relation to place to be achieved?
- How do we ‘locate’ or activate our visionary selves?
- How is a personally authentic, an auto-chorionic creative imaginary to be perceived and recognised, especially when it is planted in the sterile soil of a monoculture?

**Through a different lens**

During the process of creating a quilt or ritual for a seasonal celebration, my awareness of symbols and their potential becomes more focused. A symbol that became significant for me during the course of the research was the *vesica piscis*, literally translates from the Latin as the ‘vessel of the fish’ that visually represented the possibility for another way of looking, and perhaps creating a different way of seeing, as a result of using this metaphorical lens. As an ancient symbol, it offered the possibility for the invisible and unconscious to take form and become visible to consciousness. The space created by the overlapping of
the two circles, which were considered male (spirit) and female (matter) principles, represents the generative organ of woman, the vulva, a creative space where alchemical transformation takes place. It is known as the ‘mandorla’ because of its almond shape, associated with the fruitful powers of almond trees; In Sanskrit this space is more simply named the yoni – the energizing source of all creative action. It is a symbol that has had many stories attached to it, but each of the titles is connected to conception, creativity and transformation, and as an ancient symbol it carried sacred overtones relating to the mysterious creative power of woman's body. Walker (1983, 1988) states that it was also seen as a gateway- for the pious, to heaven, with other culturally devised interpretations: as a spearhead and an eye (perhaps the ‘evil eye’); yet it lasted well into the Christian era as the Sheila-na-gig figures set into the external structure of churches. It is the ultimate symbol of the energy of the Great Mother as Goddess Creator.

Although we often hear about the need to ‘close the gap’ – between rich and poor, for example – it may be that the open gap is a fertile place in which ways to achieve the objective can be seen, creatively visualised. What do we focus on, how can we adjust the focus in order to see through the lens for new vision/visibility? The vesica piscis offers the guiding space for ‘seeing’ the gap. For this thesis, it symbolises a lens for looking into patriarchal accounts of history for the missing pieces, to ‘mind the gap’ in an act of leaping to find dynamic balance between order and disorder, as the title of Irene Coates’ book exhorts (2003). It provides the space in which a ‘compromise’ myth may become visible (Graves 1953). It could also represent the embodied space proposed by Judy Grahn (1993) of ceaseless ‘metaformic’ interaction for the development of cognition between metaphor as expression of understanding and its meta-form, or embodiment of the experience of understanding. Grahn envisages how this development of humanity’s cognitive processes occurred through the functioning bodies of women, namely through the act of synchronous menstruation and the creative act of giving life to and caring for children, which in turn gave rise to
‘tapu’ practices in recognition of this embodied mystery – a way of knowing through the body – what I came to understand and will refer to as the ‘meta[ph]ormic’ process of Creation through creativity.$^5$

Through the lens of the *vesica piscis* the relationship between the circles is one of dynamic interaction in the positioning of the overlap, and in the ability to project the viewing ‘eye’ backward and forward. The almond shape of overlap can be seen as positive or negative space as shown in the diagram (below), which proffers the possibility of bypassing dualistic and reductionist perspectives, where only in light can we truly ‘see’. Through this symbol it can be seen that two perspectives can slide and overlap, as metaphors and reality slide and overlap in our search for explanation and understanding, sometimes obscuring ‘reality’, sometimes making it crystal clear. Where the stereotype and archetype overlap, for example, there is the opportunity to ‘see’ what before was invisible to our consciousness. Could stories, images and imaginings that give rise to alienation and isolation, objectified abstractions and dislocation be replaced by other visions? By using our imaginations in listening to the stories that are stereotypic and those that are archetypical, the gap, or space of difference, presents another vision – a new, visible and holistic personal creative imaginary. In the space of the overlap, can we can literally ‘mind’ the ‘gap’ and see the possibility for an indigenous and feminist imaginary for the act of creating?

There were still many questions, (which are elaborated on in Chapter 5, on my own creative work). Can ‘seeing’ according to the changing seasons of the Southern Hemisphere present the possibility of overcoming monocular, dualistic perspectives; can ritual observance show opposites to be bi-polar inter-dependencies in the act of creation? Can ritualizing seasonal changes allow an

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$^5$ While many feminist scholars of spirituality, sociology, archaeology and art have informed the research process, the work of Judy Grahn in ‘Blood, Bread and Roses’ was pivotal in my developing the thesis that underpins the project in which women’s quilt art can become the metaformic expression of a metaphor of cognition, arising in and given form from embodied experience as consciousness unfolding auto-chthonically.
authentic experience of self as subject without the usual inner/outer, body/spirit dichotomy, while at the same time refusing to ignore the problem of a socially dominant order that pushes experience back into a mono-visual perspective, denying reality to what has been experienced? How would it be if that most sacred of all acts, the act of Creation, were seen to emanate from the body of woman; that Spirit arises in and takes shape from her body as in Earth’s, keeping Creation in place and ever-present through on-going acts of creativity? Could the body be realized as giving rise to ‘thought and action… that speaks purposefully, coherently and creatively’ through experience in process (Levin 1993 p.303)? What if the Wheel of the Year, observed in ritual celebration, could provide the means to explore engendered ways of being and the possibilities of en-gendering alternative and empowering ways of seeing ourselves in relation to other as gendered, as sexual, as lovers, sisters, mothers, grandmothers from a new perspective?
Figure 2: The mandorla of the *vesica piscis*, showing alternative ways to see the ‘negative/dark’ and ‘positive/light’ spaces.

**Seeing through a multi-focal lens**

Considering the role of visual images in the development of consciousness as they create and inform cultural viewpoints, my particular interest was to look at how this dynamic has affected women: how they are seen within their cultural
contexts and how these contexts influence the way women see themselves. The particular focal point I wanted to bring to explore was how the creative process might influence perceptions, and perhaps suggest ways for uncovering an imaginary for the creative process that could be recognised as inherently female. Embedded in this centralizing focus a set of sub-themes emerged, which came together to form an organic holistic image for exploring these ideas. Although the themes and their issues are set out separately below, they operate in dynamic interaction. Looking for an imaginary that gives value to women’s experiences of the sacred in daily acts of creating as life-affirming, a process which Jantzen (after Mary Daly) called a ‘biophillic’, life-honouring imaginary (1998), I came to see the possibility of uncovering an auto-chthonic female creative imaginary that could be considered arising in an auto-chthonic consciousness/mind, that is, one that is particular to self: for creating a way of seeing that might re-affirm a deep participation and connectedness to life here on Earth; one that is interdependent rather than operating through hierarchical ‘power-over’; one that is inclusive rather than oppositional through the monadic operation of dualisms. I felt that women’s quilt art might offer the possibility for changing perceptions, to present a lens for seeing each of these themes differently; and in the ‘bigger picture’, to present the possibility of creating a shift in culture for both women and men.

A respected authority on ancient religion and myths, Robert Graves (1959) referred to ‘compromise’ myths, indicating a remodeling of old myths that were made to conform to social changes produced by revolutions or invasions. Feminist scholars of religious myths have also noted these windows of change, as patriarchally focused myths gradually moved out of earlier prehistory (for example, Starhawk 1990, Wolkstein & Kramer 1983) and covered over earlier story. Would it be possible to prise open a chink, to look into the gap and create an empowering compromise myth of our own around our creativity and spirituality? In order to explore and re-vision a feminist aesthetic of creativity and of spirituality, which I came to envision as an imaginary for creativity that could be considered inherent to our femality and engender a sense of being that could
be considered to arise from/give rise to intentional consciousness/mind, a research tool was needed that would provide the opportunity for

- giving expression to the sacred in our lives as agents of our spiritual understandings and practices;
- reflecting on identity for self, particularly in relationship to place;
- experiencing the creative process as sacred;
- and experiencing a sense of our role in Creation, through a sense of co-creating that is transforming and transformative.

The research needed to engage with a set of interacting frames through which to re-imagine myself, and for others to re-imagine themselves, in a creative relation to All-that-is-other, as co-creators. The research methodology would need to reflect these relationships as sacred and creative interactions. However, it would not be a research project aimed at a conclusive, exclusive and reductionist outcome. While rational objectivity is clearly important, the creative process was central to these themes for transformation in the process of re-imagining personal sense of spirituality and femality. The research would function from the positive values of cooperation, be one that respected the subjectivity of the participants. Since creativity and spirituality involves working with liminal states of consciousness, it would recognise and acknowledge the right to diverse experiences, for self and others - the researcher, the participants and the readers, each re-imagining through lived and living experiences. With this in mind, I set out to find possible ways for engendering and re-visioning different ways of seeing, different perspectives of ourselves as women, as creators who are divinely authoring Creation in our place on Earth – through the creative symbolic that the making and viewing of quilts offers.

**Introducing the research events**

In considering the violence of the current global environmental crisis a statement made over 20 years ago by spiritual feminist and social activist, Starhawk that ‘we need to make a leap of imagination that can let us envision how the world
could be’ remains relevant (1987, p.312). In summarizing the features of modern consciousness as ‘abstract and controlling through ego’, art critic Suzi Gablik writes that ‘without a magical sense of perception, we do not live in a magical world’ (1991, p.40). I used these sentiments several times in setting forth the invitations to the research events, elaborating on the connection between imagination and the power to effect change, originally made by Starhawk (1989) who referred to it as and act of ‘magic’. The act of imagining quite simply means ‘making an image’ and precedes abstraction. In order to learn something new or unknown, we need first to imagine it. As the familiar story about Albert Einstein reminds us, what is known is not enough for the creation of the new. In the making of art as a creator and participating as a viewer, it is possible to look through the twin lens at how the new could be imagined and envisioned, the first step in giving it form as what is called ‘reality’. The ‘ecology of the imagination’, as it is referred to by Eimear O’Neill in her dissertation on her ‘artful’ method of research into women and transformation through art, is a powerful place for transforming ways we see ourselves in the world, where the art we create is the shape-shifting dynamic that brings about change and new growth, both personally and at levels beyond the personal, where the latter may never be visible to the art maker (2005 p.50).

The actions taken in the research derive from the themes outlined above, and are base in ideas about the power of the myth, dream, vision and visibility, the role of imagination in creativity for facilitating changes in perception, and creativity as an inherently sacred and spiritual act of Creation. These ideas have been explored, reflected upon, reviewed and presented through the use of visual texts, including my own art work in quilts and various types of textile artworks – mostly art quilts: those made by women in a series of workshops, and the quilt artworks of women presented in four exhibitions over four years. In each of these situations I sought to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the function of the creative process by deconstructing and re-constructing perceptions of realities for personal and cultural change.
An art-full inquiry

The motivation for this research project came from at least three sources. As mentioned, considerations arose in my personal life as a parent about the role of imagery in personality formation through the enormous amount of imagery we are exposed to, raising questions, for example regarding the amount of violence witnessed by children (and adults) through the media. Following the refusal by the University to accept visual representation for the degree of Masters by research in Social Ecology as proposed by a mature-aged Aboriginal student, (who consequently did not complete the degree), the issues related to the use of non-verbal imagery as a means of communication became more politically and personally complex. This particular event brought into focus issues of equity, especially for the Indigenous People of Australia and other lands, for whom knowledge is accessible through means other than the written word – through oral transmission and visual symbolism. It highlighted the culturally imposed superiority of the word as the only valid means for gaining and passing on knowledge within a Western epistemological method, situating other methods as less valid. In the context of such an epistemological construct, the interpretation of women’s visual texts by mainstream/male experts, particularly in academic environments, may also be devalued. Nevertheless, it would seem that an arts-based qualitative research, especially one that is deeply participatory, might offer a greater opportunity for expanding understanding of epistemological processes, as well as being able to be critiqued through the same medium.

Secondly, during the time of my research for the Masters, I fell in love with art-making through the medium of quilts, particularly the art quilt genre. My love for the formation of pattern through mathematical precision remains, and extended to include the more personal expression though the genre of the art quilt. I have exhibited my work within Australia, and have been successful in having works collected both locally and internally. But most importantly, I remain disconsolate by the fact that, in general, making textile art using the traditional conventions of quilt-making remains largely marginalised by definition and in practice from the
mainstream art world, based on an artificial construct we call fine arts, ‘des Beaux artes’, a name established by an elitist group of the French Academie in the late nineteenth century. In this world, art as a means for unique creative expression has become in large part a commodity, disassociated from its original public, auto-chthonic and sacred purpose of what Judy Grahn calls ‘cosmetikos’, art practiced for the making and sharing of knowledge through a meta[ph]ormic process.

Women’s art not only continues to be created within the context of Western culture that for the last several millennia has privileged the word over image, but also within the context of a patriarchal culture that acknowledges participation and relevance by means of exclusion. Such privileging operates with regard to textile media, particularly in relation to quilts, which are predominantly perceived as meeting a functional purpose. When the art culture legitimizes a particular way of knowing, some groups can be further excluded by definition. While providing comfort, it has been widely recognised that textile media is used by women to create beauty as well as to express her voice through visual story that embodies the life-experiences of the creator (Parker 1996, Isaacs 1997, Wayland Barber 1995).

From its inception, the aim of this research was to investigate the power of the image – in particular, those created by women, in communicating and creating consciousness. It aimed to uncover the experience of and give expression to women’s sense of participating in Creation through her creative acts. Art has the

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6 There are the exceptions of particular subsets of quilts, such as the Amish quilts and those created by the African American women at Gees Bend, which have been accepted as ‘art’. The idea of an ‘artificial’ exclusion is discussed in relation to Heidi Goettner-Abendroth’s (1989) development of her 9 principles of a matriarchal aesthetic.

7 Judy Grahn’s visionary imaginings describe a transformative cognition as beginning with the decoration of bodies in relation to bodily changes, particularly menstruation. The body was both script and en-scripted in the act she calls ‘cosmetikos’, the ordering of the cosmos in deep relationship to it, through body arts. As physically embodied metaphor, the icons made are thus metaforms providing information about cultural relationships within the group and other creatures. As a container of ideas, the metaform assists in integrating, differentiating and re-forming them in dynamic interaction which can be summarised as the meta[ph]ormic process (1997, p.541-6).
power to examine and expose, to make and shape meaning, to represent and transform viewpoints. Is it possible to consider another viewpoint on the construction, purpose and nature of art and art making? Can it be defined as an embodied consciousness of participating in a Creation that is of its nature is transformative, and therefore a sacred process? Given this understanding of the creative process, the need to develop contexts in which creativity could be researched through actively engaging in the creative process at the communal and cultural, as well as personal levels was evident.

**Quilts as art**

There were several reasons for making quilts the focus of the creative process for the research. If the feminine imaginary for the divine and for the construction of women’s subjectivity is to be found in practice - not by establishing alternative theoretical standards within the existing order, the means of production must needs be actively creative. Furthermore, since the process is not about establishing a new order of dogmatism based on faith, but about creating space for a different way of seeing, this field of creativity needs to exist and be constructed outside the economy of the same, where the One is established as normative and everything else is constituted as Other. While the art of making quilts may be on the periphery of the art world, they offer visibility into the space of difference, their worth operating outside the narrow focus of the monocular postmodern lens of ‘art for arts’ sake’. The making of quilts has always ‘mattered’, engaging spiritual and material values that open up spaces for sharing self in relationship with other, based in a participatory and communal view that is inclusive of the needs and practices of daily life. Whether they are for functional purposes, or as creative expression, quilts are artifacts that enable embodied consciousness of what has been encountered and extend imaginary possibilities. Paradoxically, they provide the opportunity for connectivity by revealing similarities and differences in the spaces between our experience and that of others, making visible the complex and dynamic tensions of interrelatedness. This phenomenon is visibly demonstrated in the conventional
construction of quilts using the method of inter-relating blocks that serve to create an alternative pattern. They integrate and hold polarities in tension through symbiosis, using opposing and complementary tonalities to present an overall, whole pattern, which nevertheless can be viewed in such a way that the dynamic interaction between the component blocks becomes present, opening an alternative visibility (as shown below).

Quilts have a communicative function in community that re-kindles or awakens new understandings and perceptions of personal or cultural experiences. They offer multivalent and multidimensional perceptions on reality, through their making and in their reception, which at the liminal level, may involve changes and transformations of perceptions. They foster self-understanding. In the process of making a quilt, I give birth to myself and create a visual object that is capable of providing new insights for others, re-creating their views of self in relation to other, in turn rebounding on my perceptions. The manifest and yet-to-be manifest are both intricately entwined in the creative process, and again through the outcomes that are made visible. Integral to these spiralling cycles of perception are multiple and overlapping acts of perception within community that become integrated in ways that challenge accepted dominant views. As a mode of expression, quilt making offers alternative ways of knowing outside the usual and more formal epistemologies. By bypassing or even sub-verting man-made conventions of language and/or design conventions, quilts are a non-discursive means for critical expression that is particularly available to women, thereby becoming ‘concrete acts of reclamation’ (hooks 1995).
Figure 3: The two blocks for Jill's quilt

Figure 4: The blocks merged forming overall pattern
The Wheel of the Year

Having familiarized myself through ritual for the Wheel of the Year with the seasonal changes according to the Sabbats that celebrate the endless cycle of birth and death, renewal and rebirth during the course of my Masters research, I had come to realize the power of celebrating these pivotal points of the Wheel – especially in alignment with the natural cycle in the Southern Hemisphere. And in celebrating the seasons aligned to the power of woman to create life (whether she chooses to or not), I was giving voice to a spirituality that is biophillic, celebrating the divine mystery of the feminine in the service of life. In my personal quilt making I was finding ancient symbols from the past related to female divine energies which breathed new life into my quilts as I made connections between choices for their design and with the spirit of the seasonal changes. The combination of these experiences brought me to a more specific understanding of how the Wheel of the Year could be read as a template for the creative process, of how this process could be celebrated in ritual and experienced as an embodied participation in the sacrality of Creation. Through the creative process, celebrated in the context of the female divine ritualized according to the seasonal festivals, the Wheel of the Year became a means to investigate and possibly transform perceptions of creativity.

As a practical means for gaining insights into the many questions that had been posed, the Wheel of the Year celebrated according to the cycle of the Southern Hemisphere was foundational for exploring authentic creative and spiritual experiences. Although it is well known the seasons are in reverse Southern Hemisphere, the knowledge is not so easily accommodated, physically or indeed mentally given the persistence of Northern Hemispheric cultural practices and religious festivals. Celebration of the seasons involves being aware of subtle changes occurring cyclically in place, within the stability of the larger, regular annular cycles, and within our cultural understandings. In some parts of Australia,
seasonal variations are represented according to the ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ seasons; and for Aboriginal Australians, they are often understood according to seasonal food-gathering habits and customs. However, to investigate perceptions of self in relation to place, re-locating the eight seasonal celebrations of the ancestral Wheel of the Year to the Southern Hemisphere could open opportunities for developing a different perspective, one that seeks to resolve the tensions arising from a displaced cultural/religious heritage and an embodied experience of place; that gives ritual expression to the sacred in daily life; and that sources understanding of participating in the creative process – here and now, and in relation to place. I took the point made by Levin (1988) to mean quite literally that the transposition of the seasonal festivals sequenced from a southern perspective might offer the possibility of a sense of alignment of self with place by

… returning our moral life to its concrete grounding in the cultivation of sensibility. When the body’s felt sense of situational rightness and wrongness is properly cultivated, finely tuned, the self can often act by consulting this living, situationally very specific sense, instead of finding itself with no alternative to following the general rules (p.293).

Identifying seemingly oppositional juxtapositions

The seasonal festivals of the Wheel are one cultural expression or metaphor for the physical cycle of Earth’s journey round Sun. By celebrating the festivals and the tension between the oppositional qualities of dark and light, visible witness is given to the fluidity needed for the dynamic of Creation. The eight festivals or Sabbats derive directly from Earth’s relationship with Sun: the Solstices and Equinoxes record the particular relationship as it manifests through the changes between dark and light such that they are held in complementary relationship, rather than opposition. Either by considering the position of the Sun in relationship to Earth, or how agricultural cycles are effected by these cycles, the relationship is always a dynamic operation between dark and light, both wax and wane, segue and morph into each other during the annual cycle. The relationship can be storied in two ways. The dark half of the year can be reckoned in relation
to the “birth” of the Sun at the Winter Solstice, and her demise (or the beginning
of her diminishment) at the Solstice of summer. Alternatively, the dark half of the
year can be seen to begin at the autumnal Equinox, when the amount of light
time in a day starts to become less than the dark, a measurement reversed on
the day of equal light and dark at the Spring Equinox, which heralds the return of
light. But always it is the relationship between the bipolar complements – or
opposites in symbiosis, that is central to the dynamic relationship between
creation/creativity and destruction/dissolution.

The re-emergence and growing strength of light is celebrated in the agricultural
and solar festivals of Imbolc and Easter, Beltane and Litha (Summer Solstice)
with the celebration of December’s fruit and vegetable harvest. At Litha the
longest day of light, fullness, ripeness, abundance is celebrated. The fruitful
abundance of Earth is again celebrated a little later with the grain harvest, though
remembered in tandem with the impending demise of Sun’s energy at Lammas
(or Lughnasad, after a Celtic appellation) on February 2. At this time of the year,
the ancient story of Goddess/God needing to ‘die’ in order that the cycle of
Creation be resumed, is metaphor for the changing seasons as they move
through the cycle that is the Wheel of the Year (Starhawk 1989). And so Creation
within the cycle continues, by integrating both the dark and the light to come to
fruition (see diagram on p. 93).

The festivals celebrating the darkest phase of this creative cycle are a
celebration of the necessary energy of dark for Creation. Darkness, dismissed
and maligned in the West, was once seen as the source of Creation. At the
autumnal equinox, or Mabon, impending loss of the creative force is mourned.

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8 I refer to the festivals by both solar titles and the traditional Celtic titles, which have been
overwritten by Church liturgy. For example, Halloween was superimposed on the native title of
Samhain (pronounced as ‘sow-en’) through Christian colonization of the indigenous peoples. In
so naming the festivals according to the cultures prior to their Christianisation, I hope it may
dislocate them from the northern hemispheric psyche and help re-locate them appropriately for
the cycle for the Southern Hemisphere.
While at Samhain, the creative energy is held in the dark for renewal, then evoked and realized with the ‘seed’ of light returning at the Winter Solstice, or Yule. Each season has its bipolar opposite on the Wheel, as expressed by the ‘seed’ of light is held within the season of full dark, just as the ‘seed’ of darkness lies dormant at the height of summer (Litha). Through the meta[ph]ormic process of the Wheel of the Year, the interplay between dark and light, creation and destruction is proposed as an interdependence rather than an opposition, although, as I describe below, paradoxically it is in recognizing and honouring each energy as distinct that Creation occurs; and consciousness evolves through separating and integrating, alternately recognising form and idea.

Creativity as ritual

Another reason for the choosing the Wheel of the Year is that a spiritual dimension to the act of creating could be explored by introducing ritual as a means for making the creative act embodied, visible and transformative. When engaged in ritual acts, belief can be suspended. Personal viewpoints arising from experience can be involved, offering the possibility of stepping outside prescribed perceptions and practices, of being subjectively creative. Ritual allows the space to examine one’s own perceptions; faith demands an adherence to those of another. Ritual allows us to make connections between our ontological being-ness particularly, applied critically when in recognition of power relations, and engages the knowledge gained through self-reflection – forming a triad that allows different self-experiencing processes to tell their story, which can then be evaluated ‘from the standpoint of constructive social action’ (Levin 1993, p303). Spirituality is commonly understood as the means by which meaning is made of the events in our lives, and the events in the natural world, told in story, handed down from generation to generation as ‘myth’. It is becoming evident that a new cosmology, new Creation Stories are required to re-awaken a spirituality that draws meaning from and gives expression to a life-affirming biophillicia. In the context of a spirituality that is relevant to and meaningful for women, this process of gaining and expressing understanding of being in and of the world must evolve
from women’s embodied experiences. In exploring spirituality in the circumstances of my own life, these experiences were found and given expression through seasonal ritual of the Wheel of the Year.

The seasonal ritual celebrations of the Neolithic and Bronze Age peoples of Europe and the Middle East were fixed by natural rhythms and their social structures and spiritual practices formulated in relation to their experience in place. Although there may be little written textual evidence until relatively recently in the course of human evolution, there is much visual and sculptural evidence of Earth-honouring and matrifocxal cultural practices amongst these early groups of Old Europe (see Gimbutas (1982, 1989,1991). Contemporary pagan practices in both Northern and Southern Hemispheres have been re-visioning and re-vitalising – giving new expressions to those earlier ‘religions' based on the cyclic solar and agricultural calendar by exploring and inventing alternative paths for awakening spiritual life by developing relevant ritual practices and bringing a spiritual dimension to daily activities in relation to place (Ardinger 1992, Ezzy 2003, Harvey 1997, Hume 1997, Livingstone 2005, Starhawk 1989).

Nevertheless, I did not want to simply appropriate or apply existing ways of designing, relating to and celebrating the Wheel of the Year – even those that have recently been applied to the Southern Hemisphere, for example that of Glenys Livingstone (2003), friend and colleague in this area of research. My research was taking a different focus, approached through creative textile making. I too wanted to explore the idea that the Wheel of the Year might have the power to give birth to myths that ‘compromise’ the old, particularly re-visualised and made more relevant for the Southern Hemisphere – using text-ile fabrications. I needed to be creative about the ritual methods for designing and celebrating the seasonal cycle to give rise to a creative imaginary that might define and give rise to a sense of self as woman, as woman coming into place, both physically and psychically/spiritually – one that could be considered the auto-chthonic activity of consciousness/mind for her as woman.
**Women’s creative powers**

Although the act of giving birth has come to be named ‘re-producing’ rather than ‘creating’, the Mystery is that the woman body holds the (pro)creative power to give birth to another human being. The Magna Mater of early peoples, who was at once Virgin, Mother and Old Wise One, ‘was identified with the Earth, the tribal territory, its fertile soil and life-giving waters’ (French 2001, p.20). While it is true that all creatures, animals and plants could be seen to pass through the cycle of birth, demise and return, it was through the female body that the Mystery of procreation was most profoundly witnessed and experienced. It is evident that social ritual practices, represented in art and later in recorded story of early peoples, gave expression to the inviolable link between people and land, as personified by a Mother Goddess (Cashford and Baring 1991). The homeland was seen metaphorically as mother of all its inhabitants. The creative principle of Earth as source and giver of all was embodied in and by every woman who was incarnation of and incarnated this creative principle (Gimbutas, quoted in Cashford and Baring 1991). Since every woman expresses the organic rhythms of nature’s cyclic creativity innately, ritualised through the blood mysteries of ovulation and menstruation in her own biological existence, women can be seen to have ‘invented’ this special relationship between Earth, rendering her forms and creatures as sacred in their cultural expressions (Grahn 1993, Noble 2003).

Realisation of this particular power of femaleness for creating new life, for nurturing and caring as attributes and qualities not highly esteemed within the Western cultural systemic values grew through m personal experience of mothering. I raised my son on my own when his father left seven weeks after his birth, which opened my eyes to women’s ‘lack’ within socio-economic and cultural contexts. It was followed by continual re-awakenings that deepened understanding that the so-called masculine traits of rationalism hold more value those considered feminine, such as emotion, which encourages a socialisation that ‘favours … a dominance or submission dichotomy as the structure of relationships, both personal and impersonal’ (Spretnak 1995, p.221). And my
experience as mother brought into focus life-preserving practices and values, an abhorrence of violence and oppression, and the desire to bring about a shift in perspective on personal and social levels that re-evaluate qualities assigned to femality in a dualistic paradigm, through which a split occurs between what we ‘gnow’ about our experiences as women and what experiencing our femality reveals.

The bottom line is that I am woman, and the way I experience my life and make sense of it is as a woman. I wanted to share this with others of my kind and explore what other women might think needs transforming and how it might be engendered. In thinking about this process questions were posed that would challenge the formalities of research design and analysis: where/how to show the place of woman as creator, of other and self? Is it possible that through the creative process of finding, choosing, cutting into fabric scraps that woman as Creator might come again to sense that place in self as Creative Source - to find that place/.space embodied by her where she was revered for the power to create life, (whether she did so physically, or not)? Can she again find a way to put herself at the still-point of the circle, as I have come to consider symbolic of the point of self-authenticating, auto-chthonic renewal? Can she situate herself, not from the perspective of the beholder, as complimentary or secondary or outcome, but from the reverse perspective as primary source - and particularly as creator and keeper of perspectives?

Women need a safe place in which to explore such questions as these. I felt the need to create space in which individual story and experience could be acknowledged in order to open the space for new, empowering understandings to take shape. In such the context of shared rituals, whether they be spiritual or creative, the healing and strengthening of our creative energy might be experienced as self-directed, an auto-chthonic process – a spiritual parthenogenesis of subjectivity in action, of healing the split for self in relation to other caused by the imbalance of culturally imposed dualistic thinking. Mary Daly
describes this act of creation as the parthenogenetic process of a woman creating herself (1992). In the current inquiry, the context of place provides an additional dimension to this process.

**Why Goddess?**

Metaphors are cultural signifiers arising from natural phenomena. Like creation myths (and history), which function to make meaning from physical and psychological events that may be contradictory or paradoxical, metaphor functions by communicating the unique and distinct by direct comparison to a likeness. In both cases, paradoxical views can be held in some kind of para-logical suspension (Krauss 1979), leaving space for the mysterious, imaginal and magical to intervene. It is in this space that we can meet the sacred as the Mystery, ‘the invisible becoming manifested as finite and visible’ through the union of creator and created, divinity and otherness. The spiritual emerges from its interactions with the material and Mystery of Creation in ‘a self-creating cosmic community’, where the material and immaterial are simultaneously manifest (Bruteau 1997, pp. 21-22).  

With other earlier spiritual feminist scholars, Grace Jantzen in her book *Becoming Divine*, points out that the religious symbolic of a culture provides the horizon for becoming. After having been brought up in a Catholic environment, spending 5 years taking vows in a religious convent, over time I too had come to the realization that women’s need for spiritual independence and sense of agency in relating to the sacred is ‘indispensable for the achievement of subjectivity’ (Jantzen 1998 p.12; also see Spretnak 1984). Prior to this, Luce Irigaray had stated that the lack of a divine made in her own image leaves a woman without the ability to establish her own subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. Lacking such a figure (or figures), she needs to develop a symbolic imaginary that represents the idea of her own experiential subjectivity. In

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9 As described by Livingstone (2005), Swimme and Berry (1992) refer to the triple aspects of Mystery of Creation as the cyclic and interdependent process of differentiation (to be is to be unique), communion (to be is to be related), and the self-organising dynamics of autopoiesis (to be is to be a centre of creativity).
experiencing the divine in her own life in her own particular way, a woman can experience spiritual practice as dynamic, a movement towards subjectivity – a subjectivity that is itself divine. I wanted to explore a vision of the feminine divine as ‘a projection of the past into a future that gives the present new meaning and direction’ (Irigaray1993, p.210). A female symbolic of natality, flourishing and fecundity for the divine has greater potential than a necrophilic investment in death, even as the ‘life after death’ of religious promise.

As metaphor, Goddess image and story presents the opportunity for a self-initiated story and image that suggests ways for transformation and in-forms subjectivity. Women can become agents and can, with response-ability, celebrating their spiritual wisdom, thereby giving voice to a divinity of femality that makes available the experience of an integral subjectivity by acknowledging and renewing a sense of our role in Creation as active agents – incarnating the creative principle in our bodies, our lives and our textile art as women. As such it presents a spirituality of Creation and creativity that emerges from our experiences of being ‘woman’ – by re-viewing our femality in its present construction, moving through to a sense of self that is experienced as self-authoring, to an auto-chthonic consciousness that is parthenogenetically authored.

**Why feminist?**

At the effect of millennia of reversal of religious story, it seems likely to be difficult for a woman to position herself at the centre, the symbolic hub of the Wheel round which all creation turns. Irigaray’s writings address this issue consistently in ways that are poetic, provocative, metaphoric and visceral in content and intent. I found her work to be deeply inspirational in coming to understand the term ‘self’ in the process of ‘unfolding’ (1999, p.88). In her analysis, the means by which women’s knowing of herself through her embodiment (*physis*) is conditioned by the use of man’s *architechnē*, his language, that becomes ‘a factitious blossoming’, which overlooks woman’s *physis*, a remainder still. I am
extending and altering the term ‘feminine imaginary’, originally used by Irigaray and taken up by Jantzen (Jantzen 1998, p.95) to mean a process in which ‘deliberate imaginative projection can be used as a conscious strategy’, not only ‘for refiguring the divine in a feminist religious symbolic’, but for re-visioning an auto-chthonic, parthenogenetic experience of inherent femality in the divine order of creation, shaped and transformed by our relationship to Earth, and through our creative works. Susan Gray’s retelling of the mystery of Creation makes central a feminist imaginary expressed by the seasonal cycle as the cyclic process of differentiation and communion towards autopoiesis as

...emblematic of a cyclical view of nature and time. It was the wheel of the seasons turning and of the sun chariot as it moved across the sky. Her journey across the dark sea of night and the even deeper darkness of winter and Her subsequent rebirth was a message of hope and renewal. She died in the darkness of winter bringing about the death of all Nature; she was reborn in the spring, bringing about its awakening along with Her own, the birth of Her daughter, or maiden self. Human rituals were necessary to help turn her wheel and to bring Her back when She died in the dark of winter. (1999, p.71-72)

By imagining ourselves into divinity as a means to gain authentic subjectivity, we are becoming who we are through our own understanding of our embodied experiences, rather than defining ourselves in relation to men’s.

The position I have taken is this inquiry is to look through the lens, in dark and light, to actively step into the ‘gap’ with the intention and aim of disrupting the masculinist symbolic that has the effect of making All-that-is-other (animate and inanimate, including their God) invisible through a perception of ‘lack’, or simply ‘not’. In considering the possibility for an auto-chthonic feminist imaginary for creativity and spirituality I am not suggesting one that can only be seen ‘in the mind’s eye’, as Starhawk puts it (1990, p.72). I have imagined that the vision of an integrated cultural symbolic can be made available and accessible through visible, embodied expressions, in ritual celebration of woman’s embodiment of her place on Earth and through her works of creative art. The experience offered to women who participated in the workshops and exhibitions was intended to open the space for the inclusion of their particular corporeal and spiritual
experiences, thereby the possibility for imagining a way of seeing that acknowledges a connected, authentic subjectivity and life-affirming metaphor for the divine.

**Methods for investigating creative processes**

A central focus of the inquiry was to explore experiences that are transformative of self and other in relationship with the cycle of nature’s seasons in time and place as it is experienced through the repeating cycle of growth, destruction decay and regeneration. The cycle that is the Wheel of the Year observed symbolically in ritual celebration and represented by creative activities provided a template for the creative processes in our personal and communal lives by incorporating and re-visioning for the present the European cultural heritage of a female-centred, indigenous spirituality. As a form of spiritual practice, the eight annual ritual observances of Earth’s cycles are an embodied metaphor for participating in Creation, a process that could be perceived as sacred because it is auto-cthonic, parthenogenetic. I saw the Wheel of the Year as a living, lived framework and means to stimulate creativity, as well as to provide a context for experiencing the process by which Creation occurs through actively engaging in the creative process in personal, communal and cultural contexts.

The first and most personal context has been through my own self-reflexive processes of creating a series of art quilts for the Wheel of the Year in the Southern Hemisphere; particularly influenced by my sense of being in, re-creating and being created by the place in which I live, the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. In developing a second series of quilts in respect to the Wheel of the Year, reflections on the creative process as sacred, transformative, and auto-cthonic became deepened through my personal experiences of a growing sense of self, embodied in place. Using the template of the stages of creativity on the Wheel of the Year, this process in turn informed my conducting a series of workshops for women in creative textiles, held according to the seasonal
celebrations of the Wheel of the Year for the Southern Hemisphere. The Soul Seasons workshops, as they were called, provided the participants with direct personal experience of creating according to the rituals grounded in the indigenous Western religious celebrations of the Wheel of the Year by means of teaching, both in relation to textile fabrications and through sharing my understanding of the unfolding of creativity in the cycle of the Wheel of the Year as I have experienced it in the place of my birth, in the Southern Hemisphere.

The third research process evolved out of my involvement with and love of textile art as quilt art, and came into being as a series of annual exhibitions of women’s creative quilts through which the additional dimension of viewing art could be investigated. These events gave me the opportunity to explore creativity as a means for changing perceptions – this time in those who came to view the quilts as art works hanging in a gallery. The exhibitions were perceived as a celebration not only of skill, but also of insight and values expressed visibly and interpreted through their visual representation in a public arena. Each of the four exhibitions engaged the artists and the viewers in a meta[ph]ormic creative process, both as it is expressed by the women artists exhibiting, and how it may have been experienced by those who viewed them. The exhibitions were thematically connected to remembering the past, honouring the present and imagining the future. As metaphor and metaform use the two wings of imagination and understanding in the meta[ph]ormic process of creation, in which ‘being’ gives expression to itself as ‘becoming’, the making and viewing of art provides the space for such dynamic and cyclic interaction, and relational ways of being. Just as each season of the Wheel is a window onto the world around us, each work of art in the making and viewing provides windows through which views of the world can form and be re-formed, offering new perspectives for creating different ways of seeing. Art provides what Suzi Gablik describes as a space of ‘permeability’ between art and viewer (1991, p.163).
For the duration of the research process I was continually making notes of my observations, recorded at length in journals. In a visual diary I worked on the ideas for the quilt series through a constant, complex interaction between readings and ritual celebrations, observations of the natural environment and my own personal psyche as I noticed insights, emotions and experiences. All of these activities allowed a greater depth of field through which to inquire into the creative dynamic on a personal level. Although they are not included in the present document, preparation for the workshops was extensively noted, as were my reflections following the workshops. Another means for recording data included interviews with both workshop participants and with members of the public who visited the gallery during the exhibitions. To recall the old adage: a picture is worth a thousand words perhaps the most significant record is the art works themselves. The workshops held the space in which images emerged, the art making could happen, and they could be engaged with by the public in the exhibitions. My personal interaction with the artworks in the exhibitions was recorded in many complex ways: by way of being promoter and curator; in conversation with artists, visitors and comments recorded in the visitors book; and by way of reviews for magazines and newsletters for quilting networks and associations.

Towards an auto-chthonic female creative aesthetic

It is possibly common understanding that, for contemporary Indigenous Peoples it would be difficult to separate the domains of creativity, spirituality and a sense of connectedness to Earth’s creativity. Clements (2004) points out that in the Indigenous mind, knowing (epistemology) and being (ontology) are inseparable. Described in the Macquarie (2nd Edition) as also meaning ‘innate, inherent, native, natural’, the dictionary points to the usual use of the word ‘indigenous’ as being followed by the preposition ‘to’, suggesting a region or location. Place as context for being, be it physical or in the ‘pecking order’ of social belonging, influences sense of self, formed as it is in relation to others in place. In this inquiry the artistic creations have emerged from bodies in relation to place: as the
body of Earth as the Wheel of the Year in the Southern Hemisphere; as the body of woman re-visioned as Goddess; and as a body of quilts, some created in workshops and others shown in exhibition where they were received by bodies. Creating textile art in the context of ritual practice to celebrate the seasonal festivals in place provided the opportunity for investigating and re-visioning constructions of identity, for exploring a sense of being innately present to our place on Earth as creative and self-creating woman.

The extent to which visual material influences our perception of self, of other and our connection to both in our physical and spiritual environment was the starting point for this project. Why do people insist on creating the illusion of snow in a country immersed in searing heat and threatened by bushfires, to remember a scene of religious significance that happened on the other side of the world? In his 1991 book on the interconnection between art (as embodied expression, metaform) and physics (as cognitive explanation, metaphor), Leonard Schlain examined the cause and effect relationship between the visible world represented in image with the theoretical descriptions applied through the discourse of physics, and presents a case for art as the precursor to physics and scientific ways of knowing. In 1998 he extended his exploration into the field of religion and documented the socio-cultural effects of ways of knowing by considering the change from earlier visual, embodied and imaginal expressions of cognition to the adoption of a lineal abstract script, which he posits led to cultural imbalance and ultimately the dominance of patriarchy. His claims that the imaginal space of art, representing ‘the preverbal stages’ of new concepts and ways of thinking, embodies the potential to revolutionise ways of being and becoming and will eventually ‘change a civilisation’ (1991, p.17). In suggesting a direct correlation between the ‘Western project’ and its ‘necrophilic imagery’ that symbolises the existing social order, Grace Jantzen likewise proposes that the latter not only ‘expresses the imaginary but also shapes it’ (1998, p.156). The implications of these propositions for this project are significant. If the imagery of our everyday lives gives shape to understanding and meaning in reciprocal
meta[ph]ormic interaction, then what we create has the power to alter perceptions and ways of seeing. As imagination and imagery changes so does meaning and understanding, accordingly altering perceptions of contexts. Likewise, the ability to recognise changes in context has the power to render new understandings, and engender the ability to respond even more potently and creatively.

As suggested earlier, ‘grand narratives’ have over centuries formed and re-formed, continually covering over the gaps around notions of women’s participation in creativity and spirituality, reinforcing the split between mind and matter, body from spirit. The concept of creativity as pertaining to artistic ‘genius’ based on gender and enshrined in patriarchal religious tenets, has led to woman’s loss of an imaginary of her own, and a disassociation from divine power to effect any form of creation. Traditional gendered ways of seeing stereotype woman by reason of her connections to ‘natural processes’ such as giving life, nurturing and caring, and by her connection to Earth – stories that have taken root from their germination, cultivation and propagation in a dualistic oppositional framework of story-telling that allows for and perpetuates a diminishment of her powers to give life, the most sacred of powers, but also of her creative capacity, particularly in the visual and creative arts.

As woman aware of living within another paradigm not of my creating, I have constantly been seeking that place where self-initiated transformation can be found – originating from my own searching, and acted upon as a means towards personal empowerment for change. The search for a spiritual feminist aesthetic for creativity requires not simply the exposition of beliefs and practices that define women as ‘lacking’, presenting an imbalance that continues to live in the structures of power relations, including the arts (Battersby 1989). It requires exploring and exposing a positive alternative view that celebrates society and art as the creation of women (Gottner-Abendroth 1982, Grahn 1997). It requires a way of seeing that values art that is
moved by empathetic attunement, not tied to an art-historical logic but orienting us to the cycles of life, [that] helps us to recognise that we are part of an interconnected web that ultimately we cannot dominate. Such art begins to offers completely different way of looking at the world (Gablik 1991, p.88)

If creative acts change one thing into another, whether individual pieces of cloth joined to make a whole quilt, or thought patterns into different ways of seeing, the process involves transformation, which can operate at both personal and cultural levels.
Figure 5: Deb Leake, ‘5/9 – the future will fill the gaps’ (70 x70cms)

This quilt mimics the traditional form of the nine-patch block, which can be easily identified. Even though four squares are missing, the presence of the five square patches in formation alludes to the presence of another four patches complete the formation of a nine-patch block, (known as a-modal completion). It is the interplay between what is seen and not visible materially that gives this quilt form.
The three physical events, or situations in which the inquiry took place fostered a creative approach for me as the researcher. As they continued to progress, I saw them as interactive and interdependent, in reciprocal and creative relationship in the development of my methodologies. My own personal creative processes experienced through the quilts that I made for the Wheel of the Year were reflected upon and noted in journals during the process. Likewise, the inspiration for the ritual scripts for the Soul Seasons workshops, and the themes to explore the notions of an auto-chthonic creativity in connection to place publicly through the re-fabricating exhibitions, arose from my own personal understandings and insights as I ritually celebrated the seasonal cycles through quilt making and facilitating the workshops.

**A creatively organic and interactive research process**

The research was initiated by a desire to explore, deepen and celebrate my own psycho-spiritual experiences of participating in creation, arising in tandem with a desire to explore the impact of visual data on our personal psyches and our cultural worldviews – that what we see and create matters. In this sense, it has been an experience of passionate involvement as facilitator, especially as the research has had the potential agent to effect social change. I was studying what I was doing, at then same time as doing what I was studying ‘in a congruency of life aims and research’ (Braud and Anderson 1998, p.273). The research is not just about creativity: it engages directly with the creative process being explored. The presentation of the art quilts as Appendices invites the reader to an interactive engagement with another mode of presentation – the visual text through virtual presentation of the four exhibitions and my quilt series for the Wheel of the Year. In this way, the experiences of the researcher and research participants are enabled to communicate the ‘unique and yet potentially universal nature of the experiences studied’ (Braud and Anderson 1998, p.30).

Each of these research processes had the intention to explore a (re-)positioning of self coming in to place, in relation to other, and in relation to self finding an
authentic subjectivity through acts of creativity. In this way, through the convergence of the research experiences as they could be seen to interweave through each other, an active and creatively organic approach to the research emerged in alignment with and underpinned by my feminist orientation. The three approaches spiraled through the cycles of the research to bring a lived awareness of the particularity of the moment in place. The complexity afforded by the such interactions allows the methodology to unfold creatively and organically, in a way that is non-reductionist, enabling engagement with the subjective experiences of all involved - including the readers, in continual creative interaction.

The changing patterns of the seasonal cycle offered a possible meta[ph]ormic experience for the creative process, one that could be experienced physically in tandem with the Earth. In addressing the seasons according to their local manifestation, abstracted beliefs and fixed perceptions could be called into question through the development of ritual celebrations appropriate to the natural cycles at the place where they were being celebrated. Ritual expression of the festivals of Wheel of the Year became the stage for exploring the elements and phases of the creative process and for engaging with the creative process as an engagement with the Mystery of Creation-in-transformation occurring through our acts of creativity. Such a context could offer experience of Creation as imminent and in process, and therefore, transformative on both personal and societal levels; of identifying and understanding self in relation to All-that-is-other. And, most importantly, it could give rise to re-imagining a sense of self as agent in the sacred and creativity as a spiritual and sacred experience.
Figure 6: The double square

The figure of the double square shows symbolically the four research methods, heuristic, phenomenological, organic and feminist, interacting with the four events of the workshops, exhibitions, my art praxis and the action research.

The research examines the creative process through the considering the roles of metaphor and metaform in reciprocal relationship for the construction of cognition through perception by using the quilt form. The methodological approaches taken by this inquiry suggest that metaphoric perspectives and methods are integrally interwoven, providing space for alternative perspectives to become evident through their interdependence. In the creation of a quilt, conceptual content and visual design sit side by side, and the scraps of fabric chosen for the design come together both by intention and intuitively. In the case of the art quilt, the intention is to push the boundaries of the conventionally accepted quilt medium, not only in form but also by allowing the self-reflexive process. A similar process
is happening in my representation of the data through the methodological approaches taken. The Wheel of the Year is the predominant visual and conceptual symbolic for the research processes, enabling the metaphoric and experiential to intertwine in an interactional meta[ph]ormic way. During the process of piecing together the various blocks that contributed to the inquiry I found another symbol helpful in provides visual representation of the dynamic interaction that occurred between the methodology and the three research events through which the theoretical positions were being explored. As they have been outlined in the previous chapter, the workshops, exhibitions, my personal praxis can be seen to be interwoven with an interactive action approach to research, approaches that include and meld the heuristic and transpersonal, the organic and phenomenological with a feminist position for exploring knowledge acquisition.

The choice of the image of the interlocking squares to represent visually the synthesis of research processes and their analyses was made for several personal interpretations through which I found a connection to this image. For one thing, when enclosed within a circle, the double circle represents the traditionally celebrated eight seasonal festivals for the Wheel of the Year. The annotation by Barbara Walker resonated with my interpretation of the symbol, expressed accordingly:

Since the square was often interpreted as the quintessential sign of orderliness, the breaking of its lines by another square, set askew, was sometimes viewed as a sign of disorder, or at least of intrusion. Then again, the double square was seen as a union of disparate principles, as in the hexagram, yang and yin, or double furka. In a sense, the natural universe itself could be alluded to by an interweaving of order and disorder (90’ and 45’ angles), which ultimately created a harmonious design (Walker 1988, p.67).

The inert symbol as it is represented on this page contains other forms, and gives rise to other concepts, which give life to the processes undertaken during the life of the research. It gives rise to a dialectic that emerges between experience as metaform and understanding as metaphor, representing a
meta(ph)ormic perspective as a dialectic through the reciprocally inclusive interaction of the two.

**Introduction to methodological approaches**

The approaches taken to both formulating and reviewing the research processes unfolded through a spiraling process in accord with the complexities of the theoretical underpinnings as they relate to the creative process as spiritual, creational and auto-chthonic of self in relation to place. In aiming to effect transformations in perceptions and perspectives that are physical and spiritual, embodied and emotional, a qualitative approach unfolded during the period of the inquiry was a creative synthesis experienced holistically. Since the experiences being researched were being investigated through both creating and viewing the visual medium of quilts, it was vital to use methods that allowed for and could reveal liminal experiences, those outside the ‘ego’ and outside socially constructed relationships, that could open up alternative perceptions of self and self in relationship to All-that-is-other. In such liminal space, experiences can be reflected upon, evaluated, integrated and inform the next stage of an ongoing inquiry in all its elements – in this inquiry, the combination of ritualised workshops for creativity, public exhibitions of women’s art quilts, and my own personal creative practice of quilt making.

The qualitative methods that have informed the processes of the research came together in a living, organic and creative synthesis both in setting up the instruments of the research and in analysing the data. In the process of creating the research events, the methods of inquiry evolved as a dynamic synthesis between approaches that can be identified as heuristic and phenomenological, while finding the meta[ph]ormic gap by looking through the lenses of feminist spiritualities and epistemologies. Most importantly, these methodologies have informed the spiritual, transpersonal and transformational natures of this inquiry, in which an adaptation of the organic approach of Clements, Ettling, Jenett and Shields (in Braud and Anderson 1998, p. 114-127) can be seen to be at work.
Such an approach helped situate the experience of creativity and spirituality in a dialectic by means of which the construction of knowledge can be continually renewed and re-viewed. In this way, the research methods reflect a research for social action arising from the desire to effect change in the wider community, not only during the life of the research, but also in future relationships with readers. The living template for this process of renewal, the physical ‘ground’ and ritual space in which two of the research events occurred was the Wheel of the Year, observed in place and in phase with the seasons of the Southern Hemisphere. In this context, symbolic conceptual/spiritual space are united with grounded experience. It could offer the possibility for another creative round with the potential for insights that could alter long-held, perhaps unconsciously held concepts, encouraging a response-ability through self-empowering sensibilities. Some characteristic features of the Wheel of the Year celebrations will be described at the end of this chapter by way of introducing its use in the workshops.

**A transpersonal approach**

In a research process where intuitive heuristic approaches are used, the methodology creatively interacts with the research question, rather than being determined by the question (Moustakis & Douglass 1985, Reinhartz 1992). By using research methods that focus on the transpersonal nature of human experiences, qualitative methodologies’ contribution to knowledge in the field of the social sciences examine ways of expanding a sense of self that is personal and yet extends beyond the personal (Braud and Anderson 1998). It is a method of re-searching without regard necessarily to finding definitive answers with expected universal application. The methodological approaches taken in this research represented a ‘dialectic rather than a dualistic epistemology’, an epistemology that involves ‘…the dialectic and interactive unity (distinction within unity) of human and natural worlds, mind and body, ideal and material, and the cooperation of self and other’ (Nancy Hartsock 1983, p.287). It is appropriate that
the dialectical approach works through problems, often by way of synthesis, often leading to new and productive ideas.

As mentioned, the physical contexts in which the inquiry took place were threefold: my personal work, workshops and exhibitions. In each of these situations the creative process was given witness, from the stage of initial inspiration to its manifestation in the form of quilts, a process that was experienced privately and personally, and in community with public exhibitions. This witnessing process was itself a dialectic process, which had at its core the intention to nourish personal transformation in all participants, workshop participants, visitors to the exhibitions, the reader – and not least, myself. Women’s stories were recorded as narratives through interviews with workshop participants and with some of the public visitors to the four exhibitions. The reciprocal interaction of telling and listening in the storying process also occurred visually in the stories narrated through the quilts, by their makers and by the quilts themselves in the way they were perceived and storied by those who saw them. Women who participated in the workshops shared their Creation Stories, as I came to refer to them, with others in a ritual space that recognises and honoured their experiences of femality and celebrated personal creativity as transformative. The process of interviewing them later provided a further opportunity to explore personal, interpersonal and transpersonal – the various aspects of a numinous experiences of being, in relationship with self and other. By inviting the stories of other women, the research has given voice to not only my own story but is a process that invites growth within a context that understands the cycle of change and continuity as productive and nurturing. For these reasons, it is a living and lived, organic research where experiences of the transpersonal and spiritual emerge and are nourished by the creativity of self and/or others (see Braud and Anderson 1998).
An organic methodology

In accordance with the spirit and intention of the thesis, my preferred analogy is that it was an organic inquiry process. The research premise suggested the need for a ‘re-invention’, for re-creating consciousness through an organic process in tune with the seasonal cycles - one that can be seen to inhere with the practice of a spirituality experienced in accord with Earth’s seasonal changes. As a transpersonal research method, the organic process maintains an important concept: that of the interconnectedness between individual and ‘something beyond the individual… a connectedness among the various aspects of oneself, as well as the connectedness of oneself with others and with all of Nature’ (Braud 1998, p.39). I have found the description of the organic approach particularly applicable to the process of ritualizing the creative activities according to the seasons since such ritual activities are comparable to and give recognition to the creative stages that occur in natural agricultural cycles.

I consider that the research I present here is an expression of the organic through the cycles of nature recognised through ritual expression. Using the agricultural term ‘organic’ to write about their research process, Lisa Shields explains organic research accordingly: ‘It starts with a seed and flowers into something. You start with the seed of your own story, gather the stories of your co-researchers, and then let whatever happens happen.’ In another expression of the understanding of ‘organic’, the four women saw the transpersonal as a ‘crossing over rather than being-above’, or perhaps ‘. In organic research, the personal is the starting point, which processes into something beyond the personal into the transpersonal. As does this research, the writers are also clear that the process of organic research extends the concept of research, carries within ‘the idea of the sacred’, and considers process prior to ‘proof’ beyond (Clements et al. 1998 in Braud and Anderson, pp. 114 -127).

For me, this description of the transpersonal relationships is similar to Starhawk’s (1987) definitions of a different attitude to power, ‘power-over’ being displace by ‘power-with’. 
These writers’ gardening metaphor for the planting and nurturing of a healthy tree that bears fruit has five characteristics that correspond to the stages of growth in organic process. They are: the *sacred*, as preparing the soil; the *persona*, as planting the seed; the *chthonic* as roots emerging; the *relational*, as the tree growing; the *transformative*, as harvesting the fruit. The metaphor not only describes the processes I have engaged in, but suggests the way I personally have been involved in the research as one of the ‘gardeners’. As researcher and participant, the process has been personal and relational, auto-chthonic and transformative. There has always been a sense of the sacred in the activities, reminiscent of Starhawk’s description of the ‘old organic world view, the vision that saw sacred presence in all of life’. It also suggests how the research document may be read, calling for ‘an expanded consciousness… to allow for the sacred to emerge on all levels, from the everyday to the transcendent’ (quoted by Clements et al. 1998).

**A gardening metaphor**

Starting with the process as sacred, the soil is prepared, turned over and opened up ready for the seeds of the research to be planted. It is ‘grounded in responsibility, reverence, and awe for the earth and all her inhabitants as well as for the Mysteries of creativity’ (Clements et al. 1998, p.117). As mentioned, my exploration into early European peoples’ spirituality arising from their indigenous connection to place occurred through the creation of a series of art quilts for a Masters degree. It was in this space that the soil was prepared, and in which I saw the possibility of new ways to position myself in relation to my own art praxis, where new intentions and insights might form to provide the compost for another round of creativity on the Wheel of the Year, with Earth as progenitor and teacher. The planting of the seed in the dark soil grew from my personal desire to extend and deepen my experience of Earth’s cycles in the place where I live through my textile art – that the Wheel of the Year was the site from which to explore the creative process as I was experiencing it locally.
A personal motivation brings with it a realisation that my personal attitudes and experiences accompany the study: ‘...organic research acknowledges the researcher’s story as a point of beginning and as a filter for the other stories she or he will gather’ (Clements et al. 1998, p.118). After the soil has been composted and received the seed, ideas take root in the invisible chthonic process needed to support the plant’s growth. For the plant to develop and bear fruit, the gardener-researcher nurtures the invisible rooting system, knowing that the research has an underground life of its own. She trusts the unconscious processes will become visible in time, as ‘this realm cannot be controlled, and it is one that offers much richness to the evolution of the research’ (p.119). While all five stages could be applied to each of the research events, this stage particularly applies to the development of the workshops, in which women trusted also, participating as they did in exploring the creative process in ritual in the context of the Wheel of the Year. I also had to trust that the soil prepared for the workshops would bear fruit to their satisfaction through tangible creative expressions in the form of stitching their personal experiences of the process.

The experience of trusting the process played an integral role in developing the four re-fabricating exhibitions, as they came to be called. The curatorial themes for the four exhibitions were sent out to the art quilting community in trust and expectation. They were another form of seed that lay dormant until the time was ripe for blossoming. Continuing to grow in strength and vitality, the research plant was still nurtured by the soil at the roots as passionate involvement, and by above-ground watering, through my reflections and the nurturance provided by the interviews and conversations had with participants on various levels. The research-gardener and other co-researchers admired the strengthening tree, by coming together in formal interviews and casual conversations to share in trust their stories of growth and transformation. Both the workshops and the re-fabricating exhibitions developed the relational aspect of ‘growing’ the creative process that was integral to the research, as I continued to participate in, observe and identify the branches forming, admiring in their stories their beauty and
potential. The small plant has broken through the soil, to reveal another phase in the mystery of creation. As gardener-researcher I began to see the inquiry taking shape from the reciprocity I was experiencing with the multifarious stories and experiences that had come to the surface, both as visible artworks and their stories, and arising from the ‘underworld’ of individual responders to what they had experienced in their creative processes and/or seen in the works of other women.

The final stage in the organic process is harvesting, tasting the fruit from the seed. The fruit of the research is evident as personal and transpersonal, formative and transformative for the individual as researcher and reader, the participants as co-researchers and the wider community. As Clements et al. point out, the realisation of this stage of the cycle of growth occurs only ‘…so far as each is willing to engage in both the conscious and unconscious aspects of the work, and so far as each is willing to be changed by their involvement’ (1998, p.120).

**Creating methods organically**

Throughout the time of the research I was preparing, reflecting on my own creative acts in making quilts, reviewing and reformulating the ways the creative process might be embodied in and reflected by the seasonal cycles. I came to see possible correlations between my own experience of the creative process, the stages of an organic method using the agricultural analogy, and the stages in Earth’s creative process according to the Wheel of the Year. The stage of preparing through being open to possibility beyond that proposed by rational thought, involves also feeling, sensation and intuition, which may correspond to the seasons of Samhain and Yule in the cycle of the Creative Wheel. Imbolc and Easter are seasons for inspiration that is breathed into the project in the liminal space of being open to how the possibility may become manifest. At Beltane and Litha, the energy becomes more intense through examining and engaging with the insights arising materially, where a re-imagining calls for transformation –
metaform to emerge at the metaphorical phases of Lammas and Mabon. Although seemingly separate and sequential, each stage offers the possibility of becoming more connected to self and other in ever-changing contexts as we move through the interstices of the seasons, becoming more aware of self and other in place, of ‘seeing’ differently according to our context. Each of these stages, involving imagining, integrating and re-imaging were constantly active in the other two research events. Having been deepened through my personal quilt making, my understanding of the creative process was continually refined as it spiraled through stages of integration and transformation, following inspiration and reflection, each stage being revisited multiple times in each of these ways.

**A heuristic creative synthesis**

Creative synthesis involves ‘an integration of the materials that reflects the researcher’s personal knowledge, tacit awareness, intuition, and understanding of meanings and essences of the experience’ (Rogers, in Braud and Anderson 1998, p.198). In terms of taking a heuristic approach, I have drawn on several interwoven sources created during and for the research: my regular journal reflections on my own process; the ritual experiences of the workshops; and the layers of interviews with women doing the workshops, those exhibiting and those visiting the exhibitions. In its final form, this document represents a ‘snapshot’ derived from ‘creative synthesis’ that can also involve a reader interactive response to the visual material to identify features of the research questions that resonate personally. To this end, the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and casual conversations, the written texts of artists, their visual texts and my own reflections are woven together into a composite description, or interpretive ‘portrait’, rather than standing as the final word or to define essential meanings of the phenomena being investigated.

An organic approach to analyzing data may be done by researcher, participants as co-researchers and in the mind of the reader (Clements et al. 1998; Rogers 1998). The experiences of creating ritually with cloth and the visual presentation
of quilts in exhibition offered an experiential and interactive opportunity for researcher and co-researchers, viewers and readers. And the opportunity extends beyond the present written word by inviting a direct connection through the intervention of the quilts available as Appendices. By far the most authentic, the most personal and auto-chthonic analysis is done by the reader as she or he views the quilts, reads the stories and finds sources with which to identify on a level that may be seen as personal and/or archetypal/universal. While comprehensively attending to the recorded data, the focus has always been on the experiential and interactive aspects of the research material. As designer, researcher and participant, my experience of the research has been a constant passionate involvement with the research as a ‘practical, political, collaborative, egalitarian, emancipatory’ action research (Braud and Anderson 1998, p.273). It was performed very much with an awareness of ‘being-in-the-world’ from the existential-phenomenological point of view of the person and world as ‘co-constituting one another’ (Valle and Mohs in Braud and Anderson 1998, p.97)

**Phenomenology in the approach**

Since the research took place within nature’s cycles, there is another aspect by which to consider the research process as ‘organic’. The organic process is a living and lived process - of being in the process. The three processes (or events) for the research were embedded in the research as living/lived, or direct experience of seasonal change through creative ritual for both participants and myself. During the research there have been the timeless and ineffable moments of direct experience gleaned through ‘the activity of experience as it occurs.’ (Spinelli 1989, p.24) As defined by the phenomenological approach, involving the suspension of time and explanation through the diminishment of the usual channel of perception arising in ‘I’ through the use of imagery. Visuals texts can bypass words, but not consciousness; they offer communication directly through the channels of experience. In action, the research methodology had the potential to elicit ‘straightforward’ (as well as reflective) experience for and from participants. Abram (1997, pp.60-1) uses the neuroscientist term ‘synaesthesia’,
meaning the overlapping and blending of senses, to describe ‘our primordial, pre-conceptual experience’, a pre-theoretical embodied awareness that, ‘as Merleau Ponty makes evident, is inherently synaesthetic’. It is significant that the visual content allows such experience, since it enables the telling of the women’s stories directly through the experience of viewing their quilts, a process which has the potential to suspend (or, to use the phenomenological term, ‘bracket’) assumptions or expectations, providing openness to experiences and impressions and so enhancing and refining interpretation through all the senses.

Requiring an openness to immediate experience through bracketing, or being aware of personal, already held positions or assumptions, phenomenological methods of investigation aim to expose initially by describing existentially, rather than by explaining within the frameworks of already held theories or viewpoints. In order not to place another type of limitation on our experience, descriptions of immediate sensory-based impressions overrule theoretical abstractions and generalisations that serve to set boundaries to our experiences. A phenomenological approach involves the avoidance of superimposing hierarchies of significance or value-laden judgments on our experiences, and treats each as having equal significance, as being a new horizon, a term that became significant for me in considering the construction of perspectives by removing our gaze from the horizon and directing it towards a distant and invisible vanishing point.  

In this way, the explanations or conclusions arrived at are ‘more adequate’ in that they are ‘based upon data derived as closely as possible from direct experience’ (Spinelli 1989, p.22). One of the strengths of the phenomenological approach is that it uses techniques ‘to keep descriptions as faithful to the experiential raw data as possible’ in order to develop a ‘rich, deep “snapshot” of an experience that includes qualities at many levels (ie, bodily, feelings) but especially at pre-reflective levels’ (Braud and Anderson 1998).

\[\text{11 Spinelli (1989) refers to this process as ‘the rule of horizontalization’, a concept that is applied in phenomenology to ways of seeing.}\]
p.264) where images hold the possibility for experiencing this type of transforming power.

In order to explore at a deep level the experience of engaging in the creative act, as artist and/or viewer, the approach I took when looking at the images is best described as a phenomenology of reflection that acknowledges the deep reflexivity available through the production and reception of art. Such an approach positions the viewer as an explorer, and exposes responses without intending that they be used to control or define existing parameters of reality. As the analysis of experience in the making and reception of visual text, the reflexivity is an active process that is continually accessing and accommodating new perceptions as they develop.

**Visuals as text**

The role of visual data in informing consciousness is integral to this study of women’s identity and creativity. The visual data included in this study, both in the process of its creation and reception through the exhibitions, lends itself to the meta[ph]ormic phenomenological approach, both in the case of participants and by extension, readers. And if a phenomenological approach addresses what the individual perceives synaesthetically – and/or pre-reflectively, rather than what may be seen ‘from the perspective of the objective Cartesian world, with its opaque qualities’ as it is described by Abram (1997, p.61) or a Newtonian positivist worldview, reality is enhanced by the possibility for multiple and changing perceptions arising from the ground between the subject and the object of perception – that space where a new perspective is opened up, where object and subject encounter each other, in this in-between space. During several procedures, I was aware of a need to put my own perceptions to one side. In the workshops, as participants made suggestions or sought advice in the process of creating their work, I was mindful of allowing them to step into their own space in-between. And while remaining aware of my own position, I also adopted this stance in relation to the artworks as they appeared in the exhibitions; and in
giving my attention to the responses in interviews, by letting realisations emerge and unfold. 12

Meta[ph]ormic hermenueitics

In considering my proposal that what we create matters, a meta[ph]ormic process became another approach taken towards interpreting and finding meaning across the verbal, the recorded and in particular the visual texts that provided the data for the inquiry. I experienced it as a circling process of understanding, questioning what I understood in context and from a perspective that remained open to changes, ready to cross the next horizon. This, combined with understandings gained through constant inner reflection on experiences became for me a hermeneutic means for revealing that which was [g]nown intuitively, and in an embodied way. If, (as Grahn suggests), metaphor is a figure of speech using measurement, comparison, transforming one thing into another with ‘the purpose of transferring power’, the metaphors we receive can result in multiple variations of empowerment or disempowerment. Either way, they can become so powerful that they are translated into physical form through repeated use; that is, they become physically ‘embodied metaphors’, developing a consciousness that is ‘entrained through repetition of pattern’ (1993, p.19-21). And if this process has the power to become cultural practice, it is important not only to identify the patterns, but also the metaphors that give rise to them. Metaforms contain within creation stories because they both externalise a mental insight, an idea, and are themselves the metaphor. It is ‘an idea that translates into physical form, and conversely, it is also the physical form that embodies or holds an idea’ (p.20). For example, when preparing for the Soul Seasons workshops, I began to see the seasonal rituals and the creative textile work as ‘metaphoric moulds’, where the ‘interactive rhythms’, (what Abram describes as

12 Considering the old adage that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’, it cannot be ascertained whether a phenomenological reading of the visual texts has been, (or will be) rigorously applied by viewers. In fact, there was one viewer I interviewed who applied conventional design rules to analyse the quilts she was viewing. This does not rule out the possibility for a ‘questioning’, a weighing up between design and content, to have occurred in her perception. Spinelli (1989, p. 17) makes the point that ‘the recognition of bias lessens its impact upon our immediate experience’ and she did express recognition of her approach.
the ‘flux of participation’ (1997, p.59)), not only presented with entrainment through ritual and art as external frames of reference, but also allowing flow between the external and internal physical worlds, which could be remembered, reviewed, and re-visioned (p.21).13

Knowledge is formed actively, derived from the ability to recognise our physical entrainment with our natural surroundings displayed externally in physical culture as story and through visual forms of art is central to this inquiry. The construction and consideration of data through a meta[ph]ormic lens became evident for another reason. In taking a met[ph]ormic approach to epistemology as researcher and an integral part of the phenomena being researched, I entered into the experience that our metaphoric, symbolist minds are constructed in relationship to external phenomena, and are necessarily gendered – not abstracted, but constructed through a physical entrainment, an important realisation in the investigation of a aesthetic of creativity and spirituality that may be considered feminist. Using meta[ph]ormic process as an epistemological model enabled an ability to step into the gap, alter the focus in order to see patterns in the creative processes through the seasonal celebrations as they occur in place, and through the creation and viewing of quilts. Patterns evolve through separation while maintaining connection, making the previously invisible visible, as seen in the connection between day and night, light from dark tones that can be entrained to form the rhythmic creative patterns seen in quilts. During the course of the research, I saw each of these experiences as an embodiment of Creation as connection in separation, in which my own responses evolved in my own consciousness as a dense and rich layering of meta[ph]ormic patterning that formed identifiable themes from the experience of interaction (Reason1994, Van Manen 1994). I saw the quilt making and quilts themselves as providing the

13 Grahn’s imaginary explains consciousness and all cultural forms as originating in the act of separation through the act of, and in observation of, young women menstruants entraining their bodily menstrual cycle with mental images of the phases of the moon. The way that Grahn phrases it: ‘The menstrual mind became externalized because females were forced to teach its perspective to members of the family who did not menstruate’, whereby it became ‘extended, rearranged,’ and developed through a mirroring process, ‘...an ongoing dance of mind between the genders’ (p.14).
metaphoric imagery, the externalised measurement required in order to step across the abyss of unknowing – or gap, by holding in place the ideas that translate into culture through the process of the inquiry – and hopefully, beyond.

**Creative symbolic mindfulness**

Art is metaphor; it is also the physical (meta)form that gives expression to the metaphor. An understanding of this interaction was integral to the methodology, with the focus being on stirring the imagination through imagery and symbolism to investigate the formation and transformation of consciousness. Symbols are the artefacts produced by, and deeply embedded in, the process of separation that gives expression to understanding and creates meaning. They can be seen as an act Creation that arises from being in relationship, with self and other through a shared embeddedness in nature. Although symbols often change in meaning through their use over time, the currency of their interpretation can always be questioned (bracketed); connection to their original source can be re-visioned through engaging with them in mindful reflection, and different though shared experiences of embodiment, which is in itself it is a deeply creative act. Carol Christ writes that

> the process of re-imagining symbols is itself a social, political, and profoundly ethical act. It is one of the ways we transform the world... every moment is a new creative synthesis of the past (2003, p.28).

A ‘creative symbolic awareness’ and mindfulness resonated with the research methods in their creation and reception, their documentation and analysis. Making art engages a symbolist mentality that is embedded in natural cycles and represents embodiment through symbolic metaforms that are pictorially concrete, visually and holistically received in the ‘all-at-once’ manner – different to the linear, abstract and disembodied, ‘one-at-a-time’ fashion of sequence and analysis (Schlain 1991,1998).14 I was conscious of engaging a symbolic and

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14 For Schlain, the impact of the stories of masculine deities and consequent devaluing of feminine and egalitarian values was as much dependent on written medium the left-brain by which they were conceived and conveyed, as on their moral worth.
imaginal mind to in the process of seeking inspiration, preparing for and presenting the research events, as well as by integrating, understanding and documenting them, where the experience and its representation in ‘reality’ were held in creative tension. In light of the purpose of the inquiry, it was appropriate to seek a more coherent, integrated and authentic understanding through a symbolic mind process. This allowed for stepping into the space of the gap where emotional and imaginative response could be recognised over the rational, linguistic explanation. In terms of preparation for the workshops and in reviewing the exhibitions, this process occurred many times over as I designed invitations and promotional flyers, wrote articles for magazines about the exhibitions, and journal entries. Each time I looked at the quilts in the exhibition or pondered the construction of my own creations and the textile items being created in the workshops, new details, significances, relationships became evident. Most significantly, when thinking about the ritual design and its relationship to season, to the focal quilting technique to be shown in the workshop and to the women who would be attending the workshop (through there were some ‘regulars’, the group was not constant), I looked for symbols and images that would draw awareness to what was happening in context, both personal and in the bigger picture relating to place, and to elicit an imaginal and symbolic response – through creative interaction.

A feminist re-imagining that re-visits and re-constructs meaningful and empowering symbols and imagery inspired by our personal experiences is not a departure from the purpose symbols have been created in the past, but a continuation of it. Recalling and recovering – in fact, re-inventing ancient symbols of woman as Goddess and creating personally relevant symbols for a home altar is described by Christ as a process of ‘creative syncretism’ (2003, p.28). In the process of using and creating symbols, interpretations, stories and associations could be identified, integrated or altered – or simply discovered for the first time in a woman’s life. Old stories, images and symbols live on in their present interpretation. As befitted the purpose of the inquiry, symbols were consciously
chosen and re-visioned in such a way as to enhance and affirm life, reflect
gendered experiences, to portray the idea that divine power is non-dominating,
immanent and shared by all, and that life is meant to be enjoyed in a co-created
world.¹⁵

**Feminist epistemology as perspective**

The thesis presents a qualitative analysis, offering an alternative paradigm for the
articulation of subjectivity and authorship by researcher and participants and
readers. According to Harding’s chapter on ‘strong objectivity’ (in Alcoff and
Potter 1993, pp.49-82), scientific empirical epistemological claims are situated
within a framework that denies and makes invisible the subject of the knowledge
claim. The disembodiment of knowledge from gender, class and race makes the
subject invisible and the knowledge becomes automatically universal and
consequently constructed (made visible) from a masculinist perspective. Both
subject and the knowledge gained are situated as culturally a-historical, outside
time and space. At the same time, it is claimed that knowledge is ‘discovered’ by
dominant groups or individuals, thus creating the subject as ‘homogenous and
unitary’, and holding ‘consistent and coherent’ knowledge (1993, p.63). In
Western culture groups are marginalized through such processes, amongst
which are women and the arts (particularly the textile arts), and visual expression
through the privileging of the written word.

One intention of the research project has been to explore and identify alternative
ontologies of women in the process of articulating herself as subject through a
feminist epistemology that is grounded in what Nancy Hartsock (in Harding and
Hintikka (eds.) 1983, p.304) refers to as ‘women’s material activity’. From a
feminist perspective, looking towards developing subjectivity for women, using
this method involves looking beyond the surface of appearances to find the real

¹⁵ Simple substitution of female for male imagery is not considered to be a solution to re-
constituting a worldview that exhibits a female symbolic for the sacred, in that it would only serve
to reinforce the normative set of hierarchical relations reinforcing a politics of dualistic relationship
with the sacred in which one gender becomes symbolic of the sacred, the other consequently,
profane.
but concealed social relations for ‘the development of a political economy which include[s] women’s activity as well as men’s, and could well be a step toward the redefining and restructuring of society as a whole on the basis of women’s activity’.

Like Shulamit Reinharz, who first raised the question of whether a methodology that is called ‘feminism’ is in fact a method, or rather a perspective, I have a similar dilemma (1992, p.241). From a feminist viewpoint, a multiplicity of perspectives is being used to develop a multiplicity of innovative methods – and viewpoints, which share the radical tenet that women’s lives are important as individuals and as a social category. Reinharz also makes the point that by engaging the reader directly in the work of data analysis, feminist researchers are ‘creatively stretching the boundaries of what constitutes research (1992, p.268). Another feminist researcher, Susan Star (cited in Reinharz pp.241-2) describes feminist methodology as a ‘method of strategic heresy’ for developing and expressing understanding from a ‘marginal or boundary-dwelling perspective’. Based in the death of the subjective/objective dichotomy, it involves questioning the foundations for socialisation and perception by providing and eliciting frameworks for engaging in ‘deliberate cognitive deviance’. In this sense, the methods used in the research have sought both to encourage and to identify purposively different viewpoints through women’s art.

**A feminist standpoint as the stillpoint**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the methodological approaches used are all part of a dialectic model, which involve allowing total receptivity to the ‘other’. A phenomenological approach requires attention and sensitivity to information and knowledge that might come through nonverbal means, thereby facilitating the development of a respectful understanding of participants’ perceptions and interpretations. Feminist and postmodern approaches to research in a postcolonial context challenge the dominance of certain groups in the construction of knowledge. By acknowledging my feminist standpoint, it has
complemented the phenomenological and helped to clarify and expand my understanding through recognising how claims to knowledge are both specifically situated and interrelated, and grounded in ethical values. Rosi Braidotti describes feminism as neither concept nor theory, but rather as ‘the means chosen by certain women to situate themselves in reality so as to redesign their ‘feminine’ condition’ (1996, p.146-8). In recognising her inability to disassociate her account from a narrative of her own theoretical and political origins as a feminist, she rightly states that ‘the personal is not only the political, it is also the basis for the theoretical’, a fact which however is often obscured by a dominating discourse. For the research, the position I took was as towards an open question. While I did draw a diagrammatical map of creativity according to the Wheel of the Year for the Southern Hemisphere, it was without intending a finite conceptualization to be adopted as a totalizing approach to methodology.

The theoretical and methodological features of ‘feminist standpoint’ position as I see it do not apply a conventional meaning to the term ‘standpoint’ as a vantage point from which to view and interpret something in order to standardise, centralize or homogenise. The latter position suggests making judgments that become static and immobilised through a fixing of perspective, which is antithetical to my methodological approach. I prefer the term ‘still point’, a word used in ritual to describe that point at the centre of a wheel, where the paradox of movement and change is held metaphorically as both stillness and movement. I first came across the concept of the ‘still point’ in the process of ritually creating sacred space, the space ‘between the worlds’ where oppositional binaries such as ‘light and dark, joy and sorrow, birth and death’ according to the ritual invocation ‘meet as one.’ The still point is the invisible centre of every circle, without which there cannot be a circle. It acknowledges perspective that comes from being in incessant relationship, both as product and process, an idea that is central to this inquiry. According to Jean Shinoda Bolen the connection to the centre is intuitively felt as ‘being both a spoke and part of the rim… connected to everyone else through the centre’ (1999, p.34). The still point of the circle is the
place to imagine, visualize and intuit; the place from which to explore the Mystery that is creativity, from the perspective of dynamism in balance. It is the place to feel the creative tension within the dynamic flow of subjective and multiple perspectives, where all can be recognised and respected.\textsuperscript{16}

Feminist approaches to methodology honour process over outcomes, process being defined here as embodied (gendered), embedded in nature (living in cycles) and relational (creating identity through continuity in reciprocal exchange).\textsuperscript{17} I have suggested that the still point is an invisible space, and as such I am suggesting that it can also be perceived as the dynamic space of the ‘gap’ – a space in which change can occur, and historically and socially situated experiences of creativity and spirituality can be subjectively redefined. In considering methodologies that colonise, Tamsin Lorraine describes an alternative economy of subjectivity that already exists. It exists as a form of dialogue occurring through what she names ‘sensible transcendence’, and which paradoxically can never be captured in language, only ‘through attentive response…to the gap between corporeal and conceptual logics (where) one can find the point of contact that can lead to rejuvenating transformations’ (1999, p.16-17). This is perhaps a description analogous to the dynamics of dialogue as the still point.

\textbf{Strong reflexivity as conscious subjectivity}

The feminist standpoint epistemology described recognises that ‘strong reflexivity’ offers the optimum means by which to maximize knowledge and understanding held by the subjects of that knowledge. When ‘the gap’ which places the subject of knowledge on the same critical causal plane as the objects of knowledge is perceived, the partialisation, distortion and colonization, of knowledge is minimised. There is no barrier between the known and the knower

\begin{enumerate}
\item[16] The Mystery that is the act of Creation has been embodied in ritual a dance, referred to in Livingstone (2005, p.167, note 20) as the Dance of Cosmogensis, in which inner and outer circles ‘move into relationship in a middle space, before passing into opposite places – becoming outer and inner respectively.’
\item[17] The terms in brackets refer to Carol Christ’s (2003) taxonomy for a process spirituality.
\end{enumerate}
claimed on behalf of objectivity. The present research process embodies the standpoint of feminist by recognising the ‘inescapable social situatedness of knowledge claims’ as a firmer ground for both ‘strong objectivity’, and a deeper personal expression than might be found through more traditional conceptual methods of research (Alcoff and Potter, 1993, p.69 -72). This inquiry forms part of a feminist genealogy that ‘aims at formulating further strategies of action’ through ‘a form of investigation and transmission of knowledge other than those established within the patriarchal discursive system’ (Rosi Braidotti 1996, p.149-50). In taking this position, I am acknowledging that all knowledge and ways of knowing do substantively involve the recognition of social and historical contexts.

But I am also subject - the arbiter, the reporter of the knowledge gained during the time of the research, albeit qualitative. What has been called a ‘conscious subjectivity’ forges a strong link between qualitative research and feminist standpoint theory. The approach becomes ‘a qualitative strategy of constant comparative analysis’ as the researcher ‘interweaves details of her participants’ discourse with her own readings’ (Henwood and Pidgeon 1993, p.29). It is a strategy for recognising (and keeping alive) the differences in similarity on multiple levels that are not only abstract (which tends to be universalizing, and develops as constraints and uniformity), but can be resonated with as embodied, recognised at deeply personal. In this embodied space, all involved (including the reader) have a sense of the account of the research as constructed from the juxtaposition of multiple perspectives and voices.

**Where do I stand? What is my vantage point?**

To describe the process by which the integration of knowledge (knowing) through personal engagement with the research data occurs, I prefer to use the old English spelling of ‘gnowing’ (see footnote #3, p. 30). The action of [g]nowing requires being open to the intuitive, while also involving the process of engaging with rational faculties (Moustakis in Reason and Rowan1981, p.216). In his book on ancient labyrinths, Sig Lonegrin refers to this process in a similar way:
Comprehension and compassion mingle; in which intellect, emotion, and spirit are integrated; in which intuition, spontaneity, and self-exploration are seen as components of unified experience; in which discovery and creation are reflection of creative research into human ventures, human processes, and human experiences (1991, p.4). It is a form of ‘tacit knowing’ that focuses on and maintains an internal frame of reference:

The investigator totally and lengthily immerses herself or himself in the process of understanding the experience from all possible perspectives. The method emphasises identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue (Braud and Anderson 1998, p.265).

My understanding of the effect of these active processes on an internalised sense of self as woman, as woman participating in the sacred act of Creation as it is experienced in relation to place, grew through my having been personally involved. It was my lived experience, as I created my own textile art and noted the process in my journal, designed workshops and viewed the textile art of other women in exhibition. I designed and participated in the ritual experience at the creative workshops for the seasonal cycles. I developed, curated and exhibited in exhibitions of women’s textile art as a regular feature of the annual calendar at my local community gallery. I adopted a rigorous and intensive self-searching, which was done through recording my processes and impressions in journals, and through the interviews that have been both semi-structured and open-ended. I searched for and found data in the realms of the unconscious, my own and others, through this integral involvement. By being intimately involved myself, I have been able to create interlocking levels for observation of and interaction with the project, by means of my own reflections on the processes as I was personally engaged with them and in relation to the shared experiences of others. All this has contributed to making the report descriptively detailed and dense, providing a ‘built up’ quality that gives place for the experience of embodied epistemology that finds a deeper view of reality without succumbing to ‘the certainties of an absolute foundationalism’, as it has been referred to (Henwood and Pidgeon 1993, p.27-28). In my accessing of the data, I have chosen to weave the voices of the women telling their stories into the text in
order to make a clear the connection between the sources of my growing and my account of their stories, writing reflexively while in the process of accounting for my emergent, theoretical interpretations. I wanted to avoid relativising experiences of difference, or appropriation of others that occurs by framing them within a dominant ideology, and present them as they are available to the reader – through a creative synthesis of approaches to understanding the women’s stories told in text and imagery.

During this process of making the women’s stories visible, I visualised myself as though viewing them through the mandorla-shaped lens created by the imbricating circles of the *vesica piscis*. This ideograph came to represent my position as researcher and participant because of its association with the female creative principle in all its diversity. It became the symbol for the processes of inspiration, integration and transformation, providing the space for the possibility of effecting spiritual and material changes in multiple, diverse and paradoxically invisible ways, prompted by the imagination as tool for change. As the site of inter flow between metaphor and metaform, I saw the *vesica piscis* as a meta[ph]ormic tool for changing consciousness, enabling a spiritual feminist phenomenology of perception, and ways of seeing that foster sensitivity to subtleties that open up insights for the bigger picture being created.

**The Wheel of the Year: a meta[ph]ormic perspective**

The overarching template and symbolic for the research process was the Wheel of the Year, particularly in relation to my own creative process and the workshops in creative textiles and women’s wisdoms. Arising from my personal observations and celebrations of nature’s changing seasons, it became clear that the Wheel of the Year provides a template for the creative cycle being renewed repeatedly. As the symbolic and embodied representation of Earth’s journey round Sun, the Wheel has long been symbol in Western tradition for the regenerative forces of nature (Matthews and Matthews 1986, p.39), and ritual enactment of the eight festivals celebrates the cyclic movement between dark and light, their fertile
interdependence and power for renewal. Closely linked with this understanding was the realisation of Earth-body as the body of Mother, therefore sacred space; and by corollary, the recognition of self as child of the Mother, especially in relation to place (Matthews and Matthews 1986, p.49). And further, ritual celebration of the seasonal changes presented the opportunity for investigating an embodied way of knowing, experienced in timed and place, for exploring the features of a localised creative imaginary of the sacred as and experience that is auto-chthonic and transformative. When the abstract ideas of creativity and spirituality are invested with personal meaning in the context of the Wheel of the Year being practiced as embodied spiritual practice in place, they are given flesh, through embedding them in the natural cycle of the seasons, imbuing an embodied sense of self-in-place and self-in-relation-to-Other.

Rather than being simply an inanimate template by which the creative process could be modelled and evaluated, the seasonal cycles are in constant meta[ph]ormic process, which when celebrated in ritual as the eight festivals of the Wheel of the Year, could offer the experience being part of that cycle as a spiritual experience of participating in Creation. And so the Wheel of the Year envisaged as a cycle of creativity, from inception to completion and re-formulation for the next creative project became the overarching method and symbolic by which to explore, experience, embody and re-conceptualise our participation in sacred Creation.

As the method chosen to reflect a construction of creative process that is spiritual and indigenous, the Wheel of the Year needed to be conceived anew in relation to place, to the relationship between dark and light phases for the Southern Hemisphere. Again reiterating my experiences as a practical gardener, the garden being a place where I am in constant admiration of the process of germination after dormancy, sprouting and producing either edible crop or a harvest of beauty followed by inevitable die back and decomposition, my starting point was the auto-chthonic powers of the vegetation cycle. In describing the
Wheel of the Year as a meta[ph]ormic process for creativity, the four main stages identified by Caitlin Matthews as ‘resting, sprouting, burgeoning and fruiting’ (1995) were extended to include the eight physical phases of creativity represented by the festival celebrations of the indigenous European celebrations of the seasons of the Wheel. Movement through these phases represents a new vision for a creativity that is dynamic, developed in interdependent relationship, and transformative. My understanding of the phases of the creative cycle have continued to become clearer for me at each turn of the seasons as I was witnessing the changes in nature in my own backyard. As I experienced and reflected on them during the research in relation to my quilting practice through colour, design and symbol, these observations became intertwined with, were woven through the celebrations of the seasonal festivals in personal and shared ritual, integrating experiences and inspiring others.

My quilts for the Wheel in the South

Having created a series of quilts as I investigated the significance of the seasonal cycle as it might have been celebrated in northern hemispheric countries (Solomon 1999), I wanted to create another series of quilts for the seasonal cycle by firstly observing the place where I live – specifically the Blue Mountains of Australia. And secondly, by observing the stages of creativity I experienced and their alignment to the seasons, according to how they are ritually symbolized in relation to the movement between the dark and light phases of the Wheel of the Year. I was aware that, in creating a new quilt series for the Southern Hemisphere, the possibility of my perceptions of what I was reading and how I was observing my surroundings would undergo change, mental, psychic and physical – diverge and converge, a re-arrangement of embodied synaptic impulses being realigned for a new way of seeing. During this time, I recorded my observations and processes both in art diaries and personal journals and completed a series of quilts to celebrate the festivals according to the Southern Hemisphere. The personal process engaged in creating the quilts is described from journal reflections in Chapter 5, using the stages of creativity on the Wheel
of the Year that I developed as template for creativity, in part as a result of this process (see Figure 7).

**The exhibitions and workshops**

This process of reflection and recording continued when observing the events which took place at the community level as four public exhibitions of women’s quilt art, and in holding a series of workshops for women in creative textiles. The four *re-fabricating* exhibitions provided a more public dimension for exploring the meta[ph]ormic aspect of creativity, which is developed in Chapter 4. The Soul Seasons workshops, held according to the seasonal festivals of the Wheel of the Year for the, provided the participants with direct personal experience of creating in the context of ritual. The ritual celebrated the spirit of each season, where the teaching/learning cycle took place both in relation to textile fabrications and that which I came to call ‘women’s wisdoms’. That is, by creating in a ritual space that centralised the divine female both as archetype and in the women’s lived experiences, opportunity to investigate, transform and integrate possible features of a personal and auto-chthonic imaginary for spirituality and creativity was provided. Earlier Goddess story and symbolisms could be re-imagined as relevant to and ‘re-embodied’ for our present context. The ritual content and textile designs and applications presented at the workshops evolved organically and insightfully through my personal reflections as I re-turned to and re-imagined the female metaphor for the sacred Creative Dynamic in her roles as Maiden, Mother and Crone, as Prima-Genetrix in the different seasonal contexts of the Wheel of the Year. These processes are presented in Chapter 3 on the Soul Seasons workshops.

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18 I had conducted workshops that included ritual previously and felt the possibility for the sacred to be experienced through engaging in the creative process and for perceptual changes at the liminal level. I was also keenly aware of the fact that there could be some women attending these publicly advertised workshops for whom my approach to creativity through feminist spirituality and ritual could be seen as confrontational or subversive.
The Wheel of the Year as template for the creative process

Although it is necessarily presented here in a lineal, flat layout, the dynamic process needs to be visualized moving in an anticlockwise direction – identifying the direction of the sun’s ‘movement’ across the sky from the perspective of the Southern Hemisphere. Like all creative journeying there is no beginning and no ending; instead, each ending is a new beginning, and each beginning contains within the seeds of completion. Included in each stage of the cycle is its polar opposite, from which it takes rise and to which it must give way. By way of introduction to this ceaseless cycle of creation as I experience it, I am beginning the story at the season moving into the period of darkness, following the waxing of the Sun’s powers and light, when the creative process has come to fruitful completion, and the harvest has given is being gathered, enjoyed and shared.

- at Mabon (Autumn Equinox) the profusion of new ideas and inspirations are gratefully collected, sorted, separated before taking a time of rest. In this time of balance, potential lies dormant, awaiting revelation later in the cycle.
- at Samhain (Hallowe’en), the festival which heralds the darkest 3 months of the year, that which only recently gave such inspiration seems to dissipate into a darkness beyond recall. Excess falls away and waste decomposes back. It is time look inward and wait. Although visible signs of inspiration are lacking, in the full darkness, the seeds are germinating, sending out tiny shoots.
- at Yule (Winter Solstice), we leave the point of deepest darkness as the light returns in a still moment which is sensed as a birth, a return, a regeneration. It is time to caste off impediments to giving shape to that which was conceived in desire for self expression
- at Imbolc the return of productive energy quickens and strengthens, sending out new sprouts from the dark. The ability to see anew strengthens intention and brings new vision for manifestation of all that has taken place in the (invisible) dark.
at Eastar (Spring Equinox) the dark brings forth a ‘dawning’ realization – manifesting another perspective that gives new shape to the old ideas. The power to contain the opposites in creative embrace is seen with new clarity.

at Beltane the creative urge is felt as unstoppable. That which began in the dark as an imperceptible desire to find personal expression blossoms into fullness, as the end of desire seeks its own dissolution in the productivity of the process.

at Litha (Summer Solstice) the project begins to take independent fullness of shape; the fruiting process cannot be restrained, and it takes on a life of its own, eliciting celebration and satisfaction, as the full waxing of light gives way to impending dark, and the next round of creation.

at Lammas the enjoyment of summer’s fecundity and fruition lingers; what has found form starts to be transformed, seeding abundant possibilities for another round on the cycle of creating as we take the next step into the darkness following the full waxing of light at Solstice of Litha.
A CREATIVE CYCLE
ON THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

REGENERATING

Coming into Being

REGENERATING

GERMINATING

Returning to Source

GERMINATING

RESTING

Sorting and Separating

RESTING

SEEDING

Seeding all Possibility

SEEDING

BURGEONING

Feeling Urgency

BURGEONING

N

FRUITING

Coming into Full Form

FRUITING

The Wheel is read counterclockwise in the Southern Hemisphere

Figure 7: The Creative Wheel of the Year
Chapter 3

THE SOUL SEASONS WORKSHOPS

in Creative Textiles and Women’s Wisdoms

Figure 8: The seasonal cycle as a fabric colour wheel

The need to create is an integral part of the human condition – necessary for a fully realized existence. Creativity is not product, but action, the exploration of ‘making’ as a search for beauty and perfection. Creativity is also spirituality… a search for meaning and insight into ourselves and our place in the universe. And not least, creativity is problem solving, an exercise of the intellect to find new solutions and new ways of seeing.

(Eleanor McCain, artist, ‘Quiltessence’ catalogue, Fairfield City Museum and Gallery, 2002)
The content of patchwork and quilting workshops usually derives from the various methods and technical skills required to make the many different “blocks” and their combinations that form the patterns for the conventional quilt. In the teaching situation of patchwork workshops, which includes imparting knowledge and information in the elements of design, colour and form, sometimes the skills of fabric dyeing and printing, quilting techniques and other aspects of working creatively with fabric, the aim to provide information and recreation while being creative. These intentions were also held for the Soul Seasons workshops. The element that is significantly different from conventional approaches in these workshops is the inclusion of formal ritual to give embodied expression to the creative process. The seasonal ‘performances’ are presented according to the seasons as ritual re-enactment of and engagement with Earth’s creativity, and for the celebration of a feminine and feminist imaginary of creativity and sacrality. By consciously adapting the elements of traditional pagan ritual to celebrate the seasonal cycle, adapted for contemporary use, the creative process enables experience of the sacred in daily life. It is a process that enables ‘a sense of the sacred’, wherein ‘the domestic is cosmic’ because experienced on some level as participating in Earth’s Creative Dynamic (Livingstone 2005, p. xvi).

With a certain amount of trepidation as to their acceptance, I started to design and facilitate workshops for women in creative textiles, held at the eight seasonal turning points on the Wheel of the Year. Through celebrating the seasonal festivals as they originated in observation and recognition of the dark and light phases of Earth’s cycles as seasonal rites of passage, I sought to find meaningful ways in the workshops to ritually re-create our relationship to and identity with place for the Southern Hemisphere, and in particular for my own local environment of the Blue Mountains in New South Wales. The workshops also formed the ground from which to uncover the creative process experienced

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19 The Creative Dynamic is a term used by Glenys Livingstone, adapting the cosmology of Swimme and Berry. I use it in particular as it may be applied to Earth’s seasonal cycles on the Wheel of the Year. It is capitalized (as it has been by Glenys), as it proffers another name for the experience of sacred energy, for the Mystery that inheres in creativity. Capitalizing words points to their capacity for potential as well as inferring numinosity (Livingstone 2005, p. xii).
through ritually participating in Earth’s cycle of Creation according to the seasonal cycle expressed both by the differentiation and integration of dark and light, a cycle also experienced in our own psyches. Hence the name given to the workshops: *Soul Seasons*. The application of ritual practice in the process of teaching creative quilting in the *Soul Seasons* workshops, not only in relation to the designing of the quilts and the use of various techniques, but more especially as applied to inspiration and creative processes connecting spiritual agency through ritual, a sense of place, and concepts about creativity and the divine for women, is I believe being addressed here for the first time. I saw the workshops as providing the space for a ‘shift in cosmogony’ that nurtures a ‘feminist matristic vision… ‘a total change in the Creation myth’, one that affirms the ‘values and ethics espoused by both the women and men who envisage honouring a “mothered knowledge of Creation” ’; one which honours and affirms the ‘life-creative, life-enhancing values’, values that at the centre of Jantzen’s biophillic feminine imaginary (Feman Orenstein1990, pp. xvi-xvii).

There are multiple and multivalent possibilities for defining ritual, from having a cup of tea, reading a poem, in the waxing and waning of diurnal and seasonal rhythms which frame daily and even cosmic events. There are ritualised performances that support an ethos of competition and domination that is sporting recreation, and those that give honour to the willingness to kill, and be killed. It could be said that we engage in ritual activities in all of life’s moments for the purpose of orderliness and ceremony, that both come out of and give expression to form, rhythms and patterns (Grahn 1993, p. 5-6). In developing her theory for the emergence of ‘metaformic’ human consciousness arising from the separation of menstruating women, the power of rite in creating consciousness, human community and the sacred are evident in the patterns of human mind and the culture created. This notion resonated with the making of quilts, and I came to consider that sometimes simple daily acts, like creating quilts, could resonate with a sense of the sacred. Quilts also are used to mark out the sacredness of physical daily being through a particular, special performance, embodying and
embodied in story and symbol that separates them in time and space from maybe similar ordinary and functional practices, such that the ‘under-standing’ – the ‘awe-full-ness’ of these acts deepens (Starhawk 1989, Livingstone 2005). Human consciousness is spun from and woven into the web of the Creative Dynamic. In ritual this may occur on two levels: by re-awakening our phylogenetic knowledge of principles ‘stored in the memory of the flesh’ and experienced physically (Cavarero, cited by Jantzen 1998, p.151), thereby reconnecting us with our enmeshment with all-that-is-other a sacred connection; and by inspiring and augmenting consciousness of our acts of authorship within the dynamic of a Creation that is continually unfolding. Livingstone refers to the consciousness of participation in sacred Creation through the ritual acts in daily life and in celebratory ritual as ‘an awareness of the deep relationship and identity with the very cosmic dynamics that create and sustain the Universe’ (2005, p. 14). It was the intention to explore both of these forms of ritual in the performance of seasonal ritual through our creative acts of making art in the Soul Seasons workshops.

**Ritual in the workshops**

Ritual encourages us to take a holistic approach to understanding the reality of where we are as we perceive it, of accepting that reality and taking on a transformation that contributes to the sense of wholeness in body, mind and spirit through a change of consciousness. Ritual as it is practised in the workshops involves all parts of the self, all the senses, in taking a journey of the imagination through story-telling. In our rituals, each woman’s life is given witness, affirmed in a way that is fun, playful, creative and egalitarian. In ritual we are given the freedom to take action for transformation, enabling an opening to our spirit and allowing free expression of something felt in the deepest part of self (Livingstone 2005). From this perspective, ritual is and was in the context of the workshops, a sort of DIY way of practising meta[ph]ormic consciousness.
In the workshops, I was careful to provide a safe and respectful environment, on that encouraged inclusion for exploring deep creativity. Each workshop started by sitting together in a circle, and it was important to return regularly to the circle during the workshop, concluding by (re-)opening the circle. Unlike the linear concept of time, and other hierarchical structures that foster differentiation through exclusion and estrangement, the circle is a structure of immanence and ‘a way of entering deep space and deep time, which is not somewhere else but is right here’ (Livingstone 2005, p.14). The circle as an embodied formation, is symbolic of sitting amongst equals and holds the possibility for changing relationships without hierarchical intention, of sharing resources and information by equally respecting the value of and our relationship with other, however each may see that. It ‘is a principle as well as a shape [that] goes counter to the social order, pecking order… that compares each individual woman to others’ (Shinoda-Bolen 1999, p. 39). On a circle all points are equidistant from the pivot, embodying an equal distribution of energy amongst those present. The circle also stands for an imaginary that accepts limitations and boundaries rather than valorising unlimited infinitude as an attribute of the sacred, a position that is inconsistent with the acceptance of gendered embodiment, particularly for women traditionally denied the possibility of sharing divinity by reason of her embodiment. The denial of limitation in traditional religions has lead to an abstract and de-contextualised, static ‘truth’ arising within a ‘view from nowhere’ (Jantzen 1998, p. 212). It follows then that in a circular structure of mutual respect, no-one has a complete grasp of ‘the truth’; it develops and unfolds in reciprocal in-forming and re-forming – and is revealed in the moment.

Ritual in the workshops provides a safe and nurturing place in which to connect with the power of the body. Carol Christ describes it thus:

Ritual embodies, in a fuller way than text, the nonrational, the physical side of religion, putting us in the presence of body and blood, milk and honey and wine, song and dance, sexuality and ecstasy. (1997, p. 74-79) Transformation is experienced as an embodied phenomenon, involving sight and sound, emotion and intuition, where physical energy is felt being moved and
shifted, activated through consciously engaging with all the senses: in singing and dancing, eating and drinking, and particularly in the forming and stitching of cloth into new designs and patterns. When ritual practice is synchronised with the seasonal cycling between dark and light, we are again physically and psychically drawing what our ‘inner tool’ – the intelligence of our own body, and identification becomes merged with Earth’s cycle and our place on Earth through imitation of an externally real-ised connection with the various phases of the Earth-body. Sourced in the traditions and experience of women’s spirituality and ritual celebrations of the seasonal cycle, the intention in the workshops is that we connect to the intelligence of the body, nourish the whole woman, empower creativity, in a life-affirming experience that ‘involve[s] healing, strengthening creative energy that expands with spontaneity from a meaningful core of values’ (Spretnak 1982, p. 395).

Ritual is a way of teaching and learning. It is through ritual that ideas and perceptions arising in the internal world become learned metaphoric patterns in the external world by way of embodied comparison. Conversely, ritual is a site for the experience that Grahn names a ‘crossing’ between perceptions held in ‘dialectal tension’ (2007). They are held in consciousness, not intellectually and abstractly, but kinaesthetically through the intelligence of the body by including and exploring bodily perceptions that can ‘entrain’ the ideas and metaphors that we can encounter in ritual. Ritual in the workshops is a creative method of teaching/learning, and while it follows an accepted process adapted from the structure of contemporary pagan ritual, the ritual for each season is unique and creatively inspired, as I will show in the following section on preparing for and designing the rituals.

Lastly, the Soul Seasons rituals are action-based, recognising the catalytic power of ritual to bring about personal and social change. Through ritualising the process of creativity according to the Wheel of the Year in the workshops, we are becoming more sensitive to our creative power to effect change on all levels, as
actively engaged agents of that change. In the deliberate act of suspension of ordinary consciousness, which can occur in ritual through the use of story and symbol, the resultant deepening of awareness is a way of ‘gnowing’. As stated earlier, the older spelling implies an expanded concept of the process of understanding or knowing, a way of gaining knowledge and understanding that implies a conscious apprehension of the truth or reality of something on both the intuitive and rational levels. Gnowing can take place in the space of ‘gap’ is called for, in which understanding can unfold as it is experienced and the word, no matter how it is spelled, has these shades of inference in this document.

Symbols as part of ritual
Symbols are used in ritual to ground religious/spiritual and political/cultural ideas. As such they are metaform as *cosmetikos* and may include multiple variations: images, songs, dance, meditations and objects which facilitate ‘the insights of the mind [which] become part of the feelings of the body and can be shared in community’ (Christ 2003, p. 228). Grahn makes the observation that the Greek term from which the word ‘cosmetic’ derives has a dual meaning: not only ‘one skilled in adorning’, but ‘a sense of harmony and order’, and it is related to ‘cosmos’, meaning ‘the universe as a well-ordered whole’ (1991, p. 22). Constellations of meanings adhere to the same symbols, since ‘(H)uman responses to symbols are artificially learned from the culture, yet (are) also intensely subjective’ (Walker 1988, pp. ix-xi). The relevance of symbols for time and place can take on new meaning and elicit new reverence or fear, as can be demonstrated by the swastika, used as symbol of Germany’s Third Reich and symbol during World War II. The symbolism of the swastika was reversed from an ancient sacred symbol representing peace, creativity and related to the life-giving energies of the Sun Wheel to represent a cruel form of totalitarian, necrophilic fascism. Symbols used in ritual physically embody metaphor and by representing preverbal language by thinking in images they evoke personal responses sometimes referred to as intuition (Walker 1988, Schlain 1998). In the workshops, symbols were chosen as they related to the seasonal celebration,
and also with the intention of reaffirming and reclaiming the female Creative Principle, the symbols of which have been culturally appropriated and covered over for the last four to five millennia. Symbols were also chosen for their immediate present-day significance in relation to place and to personal story, my own and as they were envisaged by the workshop participants, who were invited to bring their own symbols for the ritual altar. In bringing our individual and collective imaginative responses into play through the use of symbol, dominant readings of cultural stories could be questioned. The symbols used in ritual space offered a creative learning experience by means of the deep nonverbal communication that symbols provide by enabling conscious movement ‘back and forth between the subjective and objective, ideas given shape in embodied form through our art making.

The primary visual symbol for the meta[ph]ormic process provided in the workshops is the interrelationship between dark and light in the creative process. The separation of dark and light in the night/day and winter/summer cycles of Earth is not only symbolic. Experienced as the seasons passing through their annual cycle, Earth can be understood as being profoundly meta[ph]ormic,. This distinction between light and dark has in recent millennia given rise to associated metaphors creating a symbolic order that privileges light over dark in most areas of culture, religious and social. Light has come to take a privileged position by representing variously rational intellect over non-rational emotions, mind over body, human progress over respect for nature, salvation in an after-life over living in this ‘vale of tears’, unlimited creation over the necessity for destruction. It has sanctioned ideologies that embrace a necrophilic stance over those which engender biophilia, and overlooks the powerful energy of darkness in creating new forms. In the framework of the research, it has been intentional to question the validity and worth of an oppositional stance fostered by culturally induced power relations, in particular those that create hierarchy and power-over in the symbolic order that inhere in and give shape to that which we know as our culture.
Not only Earth’s fecund creativity, but human representations of it have the power to inspire, to up the stakes, to ‘raise the energy’, particularly in creative art workshops. Depending on theme, ancient and contemporary representations visual images were posted around the walls as inspiration: the Goddesses, flowers and gardens scenes, landscape vistas and galaxies. A traditional symbol for the fullness of summer found in the average cottage garden is the rose, at its peak of display in summer was a theme applied to the Litha celebration of 2000. Roses are often used to represent the fullness of passion, they give great pleasure at the peak of their beauty. As symbol of growth and reaching fullness of beauty and abundance, the rose is also a reminder that nothing lasts forever – the rose has thorns, and pain is also associated with pleasure, just as completion is necessary for further growth and renewal. Part of the text for introducing the theme of the season in the workshops for Litha was adapted from Starhawk’s rendition of the story of the Wheel of the Year.

This is the time of the rose, blossom and thorn, fragrance and blood.

...Over the year we have planted the seeds of our own changes, and to grow we must accept even the passing of the Sun. The waxing of light is ending, and winter and darkness re-affirmed (1989 p. 189).

On the micro level of the home garden the ‘blossoming forth’ was represented by images of roses in full bloom and photos of the flowering in my own garden. Also posted on the walls were colour images of various nebulae and star clusters as reminders of the creational blossoming of the Universe, the continuation of a process which cosmologist Brian Swimme refers to as

that which blossomed forth as cosmic egg 15 billion years ago... (and) now blossoms forth as oneself, as one’s family, as one’s community of living beings, as our blue planet, as our ocean of galaxy clusters (1996, p.111).

The images of roses were posted alternately with images of the constellations from the cosmic ‘ocean’ in which the planet Earth swims. The intention was to present a sea of colour special at this time of Earth’s fullness and the festival of

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20 In the early workshops, and at other public presentations, I have showed a series of slides of the quilts I had made for each of the eight seasons on the Wheel of the Year, interspersed with Goddess images, and images of vegetation and natural flora appropriate to the season as a way of integrating symbol with Earth’s creativity on the Wheel of the year.
the fullness of the light present to us in the South of the planet, and present in the furthermost reaches of dark space (Figure

Women have been incipient to and at the centre of ‘the oldest spiritual tradition on Earth’ (Spretnak 1982, p.394). This tradition offers a means of spiritual expression that may be understood as ‘indigenous’ giving rise to the understanding that woman, through her birth-giving capabilities, is the ultimate symbolic of the life force. In her essay entitled ‘Why women need the Goddess’, Christ suggests that symbols may be more than a primary factual source, and have more value based in the phenomenological interpretations for establishing a meaning:

The diversity of the explications of the meaning of the Goddess symbol suggests that symbols have a richer significance than any explication of their meaning can express, a point literary critics have long insisted on (in Spretnak 1982, p. 77).

Images of ancient women whom we know were called Goddesses provide further symbolic and visual input to the workshops (such as those published by Swinging Bridges Visuals). These images of female deity have long been replaced in western Christian religious traditions by a necrophilic symbolic of a dominant male God in whom divinity is recognised and represented ultimately by a (physically violent) separation from embodiment and life on Earth (Jantzen 1998). Contemporary spiritual feminist writers have pointed out that female images of divinity have the power to break this hold, to cause a hiatus in this vicious cycle as the symbolic order is re-imagined ‘precisely because femaleness has been identified with the body, nature, and relationship’ (Christ 2003, p. 227). That while the symbol of Goddess reminds women of our ‘legitimate past’, it has the potential to imply ‘a new feminist matristic consciousness through the very process of revealing a new knowledge of our most ancient past’. Situated in the Creative Dynamic of the Wheel of the Year, the imaginary of a flourishing natality represented by Earth’s bodily turning round Sun and recognised in the cycle of life through death and re-birth arising from the body of woman was suggested visually in image and symbol. Visual images used in the workshops, such as
signs and symbols of Cosmos, Earth, and Goddess, suggested the interaction between our physical memory of the primary relationship with our body, womb, menstrual cycle and the external cycles of Earth and moon round Sun. In the workshop rituals the potential to re-create and envision women through the use of imagery was available, so that we could again come to know ourselves as symbols of Creation and living pro-Creators of Life. Image and symbol in rituals provide the opportunity and space to continually re-make ourselves and re-mythologise our world.

The Wheel of the Year as creative template in ritual

Our participation in the Creative Dynamic of the Cosmos expressed by the seasonal cycles of the Wheel of the Year is keenly felt and realised in the ritual context of the *Soul Seasons* workshops. As I have indicated above, though using symbols as metaphors for our shared reality arising in cultural connections, connections with the environment and each other, ritual does not simply operate in the realm of the symbolic. The Wheel of the Year as it is enacted ritually in the workshops provides us with the physical and emotional experience of being in relationship with natural rhythms, with other and with the Sacred. It is an actively embodied experience, situated in a specific time and place. In the context of the workshops, the Wheel of the Year becomes the means by which to encounter a physical intelligence for the expression of a meaningful understanding of the relationship between our own process of being in Creation in a context of reciprocal cooperation, response-ability and personal agency with Creation in the world, experienced also by the means of making quilts.

The quilts are the metaforms, the external, visible manifestations of our internal workings with the metaphor of symbols, images and ideas presented in the rituals at each seasonal festival. As creation occurs on the Wheel of the Year, the principle meta[ph]ormic process in making a quilt is the interaction and interdependence of dark and light. For a the creation of quilts dark and light are separated, integrated – synchronised in order that the display of (usually)
harmonious pattern be revealed. Just as do Earth’s cycles and the body of woman in shedding the lining of the womb, the creation of a quilt requires the understanding that destruction provides an integral part in the metaparammic process of bringing new life. The creation of a quilt is an embodied and symbolic act of recognising the interdependence of dark and light, being and not-being, without valorising one over the other, as does the dominant cultural and spiritual metaphor that ‘enlightenment’ brings us closer to ‘truth. Participation in the ritual celebrations of the Wheel of the Year re-enables a ‘sense of the value of the dark through integration rather than separation, by synchronising physically with the cycle as it is experienced in the Southern Hemisphere of the planet. This gives meaning to and embodies the metaphoric understanding of Earth’s creativity. It is nevertheless felt and understood in an awareness – physical and intellectual, of the bi-polar opposite seasonal celebration in the role of Creation, such that the presence of that which is manifest is also gnown in the not-yet manifest, reflected in and enhanced by awareness of the other hemispheric polar opposite.

Preparing for the workshops

The workshops were held on a weekend closest to the date that marked the seasonal festival, in sequence over a period of 3 years. For the period of the research project, the first workshop was at Samhain on 29 and 30 April 2000. Samhain is a particularly significant festival for beginnings, marking the overlap between endings and beginnings, pertaining as it does to the renewal of light at Yule and with it the possibility for new creation out of the deepest darkness of the year. Starhawk’s analogy for Samhain to an ‘island where past, present and future meet’ became the dynamic still point from which to embark on my research into the creative process as engendered for and by the women who attended the Soul Seasons workshops in creative textile arts and women’s wisdoms (1989, p. 220). This season honours the dark space of re-generation, understood by the

21 Three earlier workshops (Imbolc, Beltane 1999, and Lammas 2000) had been facilitated in collaboration with thea Gaia, an elder of the women’s spirituality movement in Australia. These three workshops were held over a weekend, provided valuable experience and helped form the structure by which the future workshops might develop. After the Samhain workshop of 2000, the workshops became daylong to meet the preference of the women participating.
ancestors to occur in darkness, in the dark fertile soil of Earth. Caves were the place of transformation and renewal arising from the return to undifferentiated being in the Underworld, to the ‘primal ground of creation, where the secret key to all things lies hidden’. (Paul Klee, quoted in Walker 1983, p.1092) Evidence that the darkness of the soil as tomb was likened to the darkness of the creative womb is to be found in the prehistoric construction of burial mounds designed with vaginal entrance/exit passages, which were often stained red (Gimbutas1991, Cashford and Baring 1993, Pollack 1997). It is in darkness of uncertainty and not-knowing that new generations of Creation are born. This is a time to trust in the creative cycle, as previously manifest metaform dissolves and the new is conceived. It is the time of new beginnings, and traditionally marks the New Year in pagan groups.

Following the Samhain celebration of 2000, the workshops continued according to the four solar festivals of Yule (the Winter Solstice), Easter (the Spring Equinox), Litha (the Summer Solstice) and Mabon (the Autumn Equinox), the festivals that mark the planetary cycle of Earth in relationship with Sun. In the next 12 months (2001-2) the workshops were held on the Sabbats known as the Crossquarter Days, the halfway or meridian points of the solar festivals, when a full round of the eight celebrations was completed with the celebration of Imbolc and Beltane in 2001, and Lammas and Samhain in 2002. On the request of a regular participant, one of the four Elements of the creative process (Earth, Air, Fire, Water) became the focal point in the four Crossquarter Day workshops. A tenth workshop was held at Imbolc 2002, completing the festival cycle for the research by celebrating the fifth element, central to the creative process: the celebration of spirit, soul, self-within and the self-that-is-other. Although presented over an approximately three year period, the workshops were held

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4 Walker (1983) points out that the words womb and tomb (tumulus) are related linguistically, *tumere* in Latin being “to be pregnant”.
sequentially and seasonally, synchronising with the waxing and waning of Earth’s light and dark seasons.\textsuperscript{23}

Symbolic acts of rituals, Walker (1988:166) are repetitive actions that have meaning. Particularly because it has the power for personal transformation, it is important that the ritual be accessible and comprehensible to those participating, to have it find relevance to people’s personal experience, which has been the guiding intention for the design of content, both for the ritual and the technical input for quilt making. In preparing for each of the seasonal festivals, known collectively as Sabbats, I was able to give expression of my passion, to express my spirituality creatively by making a new synthesis of symbols from the past and items used daily.\textsuperscript{24} This grew in tandem with my growing personal awareness of the process of creativity practised in my own life through my quilt making, and helped me bring to the workshops a strong sense of and immersion in the spirit of each season as it informs the Wheel of Creation. Although coming from deeply felt personal reflections, I found the content for ritual and creative quilt making resonated with the personal lives of the women who attended the workshops. This realisation of ever-present creative forces found in the sharing of direct personal experience helped develop a relationship of trust, in which women felt comfortable not only in sharing their personal stories, but also in participating in and contributing to the rituals.

My preparations for the workshops began long before each sabbat. I watched and made note of the ebb and flow of the natural rhythms: the blossoming and fruiting of trees, the changing colours of leaves and sky, the migration of birds

\textsuperscript{23} The ten workshops for the research project were presented accordingly:
2000: Samhain (29-30 April); Yule (25 June); Easter (10 September); Litha (17 December)
2001: Mabon (18 March); Imbolc (12 August); Beltane (4 November)
2002: Lammas (10 February); Samhain (5 May); Imbolc (4 August)

\textsuperscript{24} The term sabbat is used to describe a ‘holy day’ and can be translated as ‘the divider’. It is connected to the word ‘sacred’ (and its antonym ‘curse’), and like the Polynesian word ‘tapu’, means ‘set apart’, and reflects the connection between creation and separation and entrainment through synchronisation (Grahn ibid).
and advent of fledglings; and I looked for connections with the spirit of the season being experienced in my daily life and my personal psyche. It was a dynamic process, of interaction and overlay of ideas until thematic symbols and patterns emerged by which to express that particular season on the Wheel of the Year of Earth’s creative imaginary. The foci of my preparations were: to enable an experience of the creative process in ritual sacred space; to remember and re-vision the female metaphor for the divine as creative source; and to guide the creation of textile fabrications.

Sometimes the coincidence between inspirations arising from my own circumstances and other influences in my life were palpable, as in the case when I received mail from a friend just a day prior to the Samhain workshop for 2002. The mail was a package of three unsolicited articles about arts-based research using Goddess imagery for the teaching of the visual arts. It was a wonderful serendipity since I had chosen to suggest mask making as a textile application, and to use the mask as symbol for the workshop of Samhain, for which the theme was transformation through ‘a return to Source’ – Earth and self, in the full dark of the season. Added to the seasonal theme on this occasion was the Element of Fire as initiatory and transforming: fire hidden at Earth’s Centre, and as the transformative creative spark hidden in Self. Another serendipity was that the writers in one of the articles sent referred particularly to the often maligned ancient Goddess Medusa, (DiRezze and Mantas 2001, p. 129-142) who, in the experience of the authors (as for myself) ‘spoke to us about our inner powers and how they had become contained over time, weakened and undermined.’ I had been reading a novel by May Sarton in which the protagonist, a woman artist comes to recognise the power in the anger of the archetypal Medusa as her Muse, and was preparing to include the Goddess in the ritual to help us re-vision

25 The theme of each season is the first component to give direction for the creative ritual design. The five main components of the rituals are described later in this chapter under The Ritual Format.
26 Mrs Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing
our sensibilities about the Creative Source to be uncovered in the dark - of Self and the maligned Medusa.

The authors of the articles describe the stories we tell of self as our masks, through the retelling of which ‘we come to more meaningful understanding of our lives.’ Re-shaping the story/mask, they say, is the opportunity to remove the various metaphorical masks women have been forced to wear, making me think of them as a sort of invisible veils, (unlike those visibly worn by women of various denominations, perhaps more honestly because more visible), to find the space between, the gap where the (un)ma(s)king, to use the writers’ construction of the term, can occur – where the magic of transformation can take place, in the imagination. Masks can be used to conceal as well as reveal, to trick as well as to transform; they probably do both at the same time. The writers continued that, as a means of exploring the creative self, masks are both metaphor and mode of representation – or what I refer to as meta[ph]ormic. These researchers also refer to their use of imagery in their arts-based inquiry to help them find their ‘own sources of self’ – ‘exploring and discovering our self and our source-from-within’ by using Starhawk’s double entendre in ‘sorcery/ source-ery’ that describes ‘the psychology/technology of immanence, of the understanding that everything is connected’ and that both Source and Creation reside in the imagination that is sourced in self and creates self (DiRezze and Mantas 2001, p.136). It was an inspiring read, and helped lift my flagging spirits, reminding me that ritual is a way of (un)ma(s)king ourselves.

Through ritual, concepts residing in memories and living outside time and space are felt to be encoded in bodies and may work their magic in the imagination as a relationship with our deepest self, can lead to a perspective transformation. On the morning of the Samhain workshop (2002), as I lay awake in the early hours feeling rather unprepared with regard to the textile fabrications to be taught, I came to the conclusion that it was more important to be clear and focused with regard to the ritual. Phylogenetic memory is an embodied knowledge, which will
emerge in the act of remembering the spaces in between by entering into the depth of the present moment. It is the space where the creative imaginary is being sourced, and textile applications give it expression.\textsuperscript{27} If I cannot provide the techniques, then the memory that resides in imagination will fuel the desire to search out appropriate applications to give form to the metaphors arising in ritual space. Phylogenetic memory, I told myself, is the unseen transformation of the season of Samhain, experienced through the creative imaginary that the Wheel of the Year presents to us.

**Making ritual for a feminist creative imaginary**

All aspects of the workshops are intimately sourced in relationship to the season: inspirational symbols and story, techniques for quilt design and construction, and other visual stimuli. Starhawk’s summary of ‘The Wheel of the Year’ in the second edition of *The Spiral Dance* became the primary template for forming the ideas and themes for the series of workshops, and quotations were often used in the flyers to advertise them (1989, pp. 218-220). Other writers from the northern hemisphere (Stein 1987, Walker 1990, Ardinger 1992, McArthur 1998) provided structure and inspiration on different occasions, though these remained guides as I adapted them to the difference in hemisphere, to local environmental influences and intention. For seven years prior to the start of the research I had been participating with a group of women celebrating the full moons and had become familiar with the components and the experience of participating in ritual practice for the creation of sacred space. The experience had provided structure, inspiration and encouragement to be creative in the construction of ritual relevant for and unique to each Sabbat.

Comparing Earth’s creative process of the Wheel of the Year to the human life cycle, and especially to the stages of gestation and birth, I became ‘midwife’ assisting in the early stages of the creative process to bring forth ‘the Child of

\textsuperscript{27} ‘Phylogeny’, understood as the evolutionary development of the entire past, is recapitulated in the process of ‘ontogeny’, as the developmental manifestation of a single being, and expressed by humans through consciousness – the experience of ‘within-ness’.
Promise who awakens within us, reminding us that we can be more than we are’ (Starhawk 1989, pp. 218-220) Of course the teaching of technical skills using fabric is expected and provided in the workshops, but I saw my main role as facilitating the process of re-visioning and re-cognizing a Creation imaginary arising from the female metaphor for the sacred and, more especially, to hold the space in which to inspire the creative process. All levels of experience in the use of textiles for art or function were welcome at the workshops, the minimum requirement being the ability to use a sewing machine (although hand sewing was also an acceptable approach). It was expected that those who come to the workshops would be interested in exploring the range of their creative capacities, and this required a capacity in me to respond to unforeseen requests, unexpected inspiration and sudden dilemmas. For these reasons I have considered myself as a midwife, one who assists in the birth of creative process in the workshops, and lets it take its own form.

The ritual aspect of the workshop provides the space in which creativity can be experienced as a form of spiritual expression, unhindered by dogma or other institutional restraints. I saw it as participating in the sacred process of differentiation as transformation of Self through recognising and respecting other, and as a celebration of the creative imaginary of the Universe made manifest by and through the Wheel of the Year and in our fabric constructions for the day. Read in connection with Grahn’s construction of conscious metaphor becoming metaform the intention that underpins the workshops echoed the poetic words of Starhawk:

(W)e say that on the Winter Solstice, the Great Mother gives birth to the Sun. But what is really born? Not the physical sun, the blazing ball of gas. It is the Spirit Sun that is born out of the Spirit Night. It is the Child of Promise who wakens within us, reminding us that we can be more than we are. And as the year waxes, the unformed Child begins to take on personality, to grow into the form and face that this year shows, to ask from us the promise of what this year demands. (1989, p. 218)
Though the content and sequence of the ritual circle has been designed beforehand, there was always room for flexibility depending on the way participants might informally re-direct proceedings. This required intentionally engaging with the meta[ph]ormic process, and being prepared for anything to happen; of being attentive to the way each woman is responding to the ritual space, and finding space for her own authentic spiritual expression and could mean making spontaneous adjustments to the procedure. At all times, it was my intention to ‘hold the space’ for each woman to step ‘between the worlds’, into her own experience of the Creative Dynamic, where ‘light and dark, birth and death, joy and sorrow, meet as one’. These traditional words for declaring the space sacred are the reminders of the paradox of separation within unity that is held by being with the Mystery of synchrony and separation, by gnowing ‘the truth of paradox’ that ‘(All) things are one, yet each thing is separate, individual, unique.’

(T)he world of separate things is the reflection of the One; the One is the reflection of the myriad separate things of the world. We are all “swirls” of the same energy, yet each swirl is unique in its own form and pattern (Starhawk 1989, p. 39).

As they mirror the flow and reverse crossing between the binary polarities, these words are not only reminders of the sacred act of Creation taking place, but I am reminded of the powerful nature of the work being undertaken, and the need for sensitivity when imagination is stirred. In this space the Mystery that is Creation in process can be witnessed through hearing into being the stories of others, as we take part in them through the act of listening. It is my experience that perceptions of self in relation to other become more vivid, and can take on new dimensions. The continuous, yet sometimes invisible threads between those present can cross and interweave forming subtle and intricate patterns to re-weave both personal and cultural transformation. In this moment of ‘truth’, I am aware of being an active participant in the Mystery of Creation taking place with those around me, respecting that they reflect and compliment each other.

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28 The term ‘between the worlds’, and the invocation referred to here is based on that used in contemporary pagan practice.
Together with this recognition of our communion is the realization that each communion is always particular and transformative in its own way for each participant.

**Participating in the workshops**

Those who participated in the workshops over the years shared a love of textiles, and most often a need to have some ‘time out’ from the demands of daily life. In total, eighteen individual women attended the ten (research) workshops at various times, with overall attendance numbers reaching forty-one. Some attended only one workshop, while others attended two, three or more. Several others made a serious commitment to come to each workshop in order to complete a full cycle on the Wheel. Some of the women were familiar with the celebration of seasonal cycles, and were desirous of creating their own fabric calendar to the seasonal cycle, and succeeded in doing so. To the majority, however, apart from recognising solstices and equinoxes as facts relating to Earth’s rotation in orbit around the sun, the Wheel of the Year as source of inspiration and spiritual expression was a novel experience, which may initially have presented itself as a curiosity.

The invitation to participate in a creative textile workshop that included the experience of formal ritual outside the usual experience of patchwork workshops may have presented a challenge to some women. The women who attended the workshops did so of their own volition and for their own reasons. It was important that I promote the *Soul Seasons* workshops as ‘workshops in creative textiles and women’s wisdoms’. While I did not want the title of the workshops to be confronting, nevertheless I deliberately wanted to suggest a deeper engagement with the creative process than the usual factors of design, colour and technique. From my perspective, a need for time out may be seen as a desire to return to the Source, with self as Source – a return to creative energies that are not readily recognised, honoured or experienced as participating in Creation when at the constant behest of family and employment responsibilities.
The workshops were promoted publicly: in the local newspaper and in community spaces such as notice boards, the local Council Library and Gallery, the local neighbourhood centres, and in shops selling patchwork textiles. The initial flyer provided a ‘taste’ of the season and was posted publicly. It was supplemented with a second notification, often called a Requirements List, which was sent to those who intended to attend the workshop. The initial flyer for the harvest season of Lammas 2002 was designed to elicit reflection on both the physical and the psycho-spiritual harvests, evoked by the appropriate section from Starhawk’s summary Wheel of the Year as the header (1989). The follow-up communication expanded on the spirit of the season by emphasising the interplay between light and dark for the specific time of year and aimed to evoke a sensual connection with the present phase of Earth’s creative process through verbal imagery, referring to changes in nature, and using colour and symbolism to arouse a sensible awareness. It was intended to enable participants to bring their personal and collective stories to the story of the Sabbat ritual and therein to find deep communion with self and other.

While the initial flyer may elicit contemplative responses in the weeks prior to the workshop, the second notification developed that idea and provided practical suggestions about the types of fabrics to bring, again with words chosen to evoke the spirit of the season, yet allowing plenty of scope for individual creative approaches to textile creations. By mulling over these suggested ideas, it was intended that the seed of a personal creative imaginary be planted in the darkness of anticipation for each individual. On the occasion of the workshop for Imbolc 2002 the spirit of the season is conceived as the ‘gentle determination’ of the dawning light, pushing out the daylight hours. It is the season of ‘Earth’s returning creative urges, urges which encourage us to draw aside of the veils of the deep dark, and to welcome a new round of creation sparked from our innermost selves.’ The idea of opening a treasure chest of fabrics holding ‘prized bits and pieces…exotic fabrics which glisten and shine, silks, …see-through
chiffons…beads and sequins…ribbons and rainbows…and feathers’ is also used metaphorically to suggest the treasure chest of the inner self as creative Source, a theme particularly emphasised at this workshop.

**The ritual format**

The space is set up before the participants arrive. To mark out the ritual circle at each sabbat, cloths of black and white velvet are laid side by side on the floor in the centre of the room. They are shaped as a circle representing the light and dark halves of the Wheel of the Year. The black half represents the celebrations which occur when the Sun’s power is in decline, and darkness starts to wax: starting at Litha (Summer Solstice), and moving counter clockwise through Lammas, Mabon (Autumn Equinox), and Samhain. The light cloth represents the festivals of the waning dark as the light waxes to fullness, beginning with the birth of the Sun at Yule (Winter Solstice). It is easy to see from the ‘ground map’ presented by the cloths that Yule and the other three festivals of Imbolc, Easter and Beltane are bi-polar to those situated in the dark half, positioned diagonally across from each other on the Wheel. Usually set across these cloths is a simple square cloth divided into light and dark halves diagonally. This represents the festivals that mark Earth’s planetary journey round the sun and divides the year into light and dark sections at the points of the Equinoxes: at the Autumn Equinox in March the balance tips, and daylight hours become shorter until the Spring Equinox in September, when the pattern is reversed. The two cloths of contrasting dark and light are the basic foundation for introducing Earth’s annual cycle as the Creative Dynamic that we are about to engage in ritually and creatively, and for expanding on the theme for the workshop. As I have mentioned, concepts associated with darkness and light are laden with cultural beliefs that enforce cultural perceptions, reinforcing binary oppositional practices in all facets of life. The division of the Wheel into light and dark sectors is a visual means for integrating the distinctions and correspondences between light and dark as they are manifest in our lived experiences.29

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29My quilt made to represent the dynamic of integration is titled *The Coincidence of Opposites.*
Symbolic items are placed to mark each of the eight points on the Wheel; they may be as simple as a set of stones with a candle placed in the centre. At the Sabbats, symbols are chosen for their traditional connections to the particular season, to the thematic content, and to coincide with what is happening in the local natural environment (which means that colour can be an influence). As discussed previously, symbols function by calling up an immediate response, and can extend understanding beyond immediate recognition to broaden and enrich perceptions and serve as inspiration for art making. A symbolic representation of the Wheel of the Year provides the space in which the [im]material can become manifest, and form and idea flow between each other, as does particle and energy. This material Wheel with its symbols as is the met[ph]orm ic visual representation by which the larger dynamic of Earth’s creative cycle is experienced and can be re-cognized. As visual symbolic art form this configuration is the ‘outer layer’ of the circle. Often several layers of significance, personal and cosmogonic, are attributed to the symbols placed in the circle. There is also an ‘inner layer’, formed by the four directions of the compass, representing the sacred creational Elements: Earth, Air, Fire and Water. An ‘inner sanctum’ for the altar, as it may be called, is situated at the central pivot of the Wheel, representative of the Fifth Element of the Creative Dynamic, the self and All-that-is-other in the autopoietic process of Creation.\footnote{I first came across the term autopoiesis in the 1980s through the work of Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela, where it refers to the study of life systems as complex and, to put it simplistically, as self-healing and self-correcting. My exploratory understanding of this term has been augmented by the work of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, and it found fertile ground in Livingstone’s (2005) analysis for the Wheel of the Year and the three faces of the creative dynamic symbolized by the Triple Goddess.}

The Wheel of the Year as it is portrayed and enacted in the workshops is an embodied symbol, and operates on three levels for a feminist creative imaginary. It provides a means for grounding consciousness of self in relation to other by explaining Earth’s circuit round Sun by providing a ‘material basis [for a] responsiveness that is grounded in an imaginary of natality’ that is imminant and
limited (Jantzen 1998, p.150). It is symbolic of the interrelationship between dark and light for the continuance of life on Earth through the phases of birth, life, death and renewal. Secondly, it identifies the sacred nature of this relationship derived from an understanding of the sacred as ‘tapu’, that is, constituted by reciprocal interdependence, through recognising the connection in diversity of all-that-is-other on Earth. And thirdly, it situates us as both participants and creators, at the centre of a creative process that is the parthenogenetic urgency of the Universe itself. In the workshops this has meant the possibility of personal transformation for each individual woman in re-cognising her own subjectivity, which is unachievable in patriarchal religions (Raphael 1996, Jantzen 1998). It also presents the possibility of re-claiming the self as divine, connected with the sacred through our bodies, minds and hearts. This is why I suggest that the process of engaging on the Wheel of the Year as sacred creative symbolic is ‘action-based’: rather than presenting a teleology beyond nature of experiencing divinity in an after life, as conventional tenets of religion continue to suggest, the ritual experience of the Wheel offers the experience of a transformation that is a parthenogenetic and auto-chthonic act of self-in-Creation – becoming divine through our own subjectivity and the constitution of our selves and our world experienced within an horizon that embraces rather than distances (Jantzen 1998, p. 153).

As previously explained, the basic ingredients for the ritual process are recognising a shared intention, which can be individual, and communal and social. It acknowledges participation in a communal activity in which the possibility for personal and/or group and social transformation exists in this time and place; and embraces the understanding that the space of participation is sacred. Translated into the structure of ritual, the following format allowed expression of these intentions in the workshops:

- Stating the seasonal theme: centering awareness
- Creating Sacred Space: invoking the elements of Creation
- Transforming: raising the energy for creative textile expressions
• Reciprocal sharing: *communion*
• Concluding: *opening the gathering to further re-creation*\(^{31}\)

While ritual is perceived to have identifiable stages and qualities, they need not be rigid and formulaic. In the pages that follow, I provide examples from different seasonal workshops of the five phases of ritual according to the format outlined above. Although represented for the sake of the documentation of the research as distinct phases or stages of ritual process, it is should be understood that in the practice, each phase tended to merge and impinge on the other. Communion, for example, as gestation of food may happen formally in the circle. It also can be considered as sharing lunch or ideas, stories and fabrics. Likewise, the process of transformation (or central seasonal rite), both personal and creative, may occur over the whole time of the workshop, or as sudden inspiration. Sacred space is constantly remembered and re-created thereby over the period of the workshop, perhaps in the relighting of a candle, listening and dancing to particular music, or in the telling of a relevant or inspiring story during the time of creating the art works.

**Phase 1: Stating the themes for the Season**

The ritual procedures and content of the workshops is unfamiliar territory for many, so my usual practice is to introduce the way in which the day will proceed, and talk about my understanding of the significance of the season we are celebrating. I may reiterate the themes contained in the original flyers, and offer some insight into its significance through sharing its personal meaning. I remind participants that, in celebrating the festival of the Wheel of the Year we are remembering nature’s calendar, of which we are part, and which is replicated in

\(^{31}\) Dependant as they are on the local environment for structure, and possible input from participants, the way I constructed ritual process was not exempt from variations applied creatively, either in structural procedures or content. While maintaining the basic elements of ritual, I felt that it was important to provide space for the creative process to become evident, with suggestions sometimes coming spontaneously from those present at the workshops. The intention was to encourage creative, personal expressions for ritual engagement. It has not been the intention here to represent the scripts for each of the workshops conducted during the period of the research; nor to suggest formulations for the construction of the textile fabrications. Both are perhaps other projects.
our own life cycles, macro and micro, physical and spiritual. Most importantly, it is a template for our own creative cycles. The intention is to provide an experience of the Mystery in a transformative process being experienced through participation with Earth’s creative cycle, and to engender ideas about creativity that affirm our role in it as reciprocally in-forming, thereby enabling an experience of the self as the creative Source, in the process of creating and being created.

On arrival at the workshops, the women find a space in which to set up their machines and work materials. We greet each other, introduce ourselves, and gradually gather around the altar cloths set on the floor in the centre of the room. My aim is to welcome each woman into the group, to defuse the traditional teacher/student relationship and foster a sense of ease within the group such that each woman can feel comfortable in participating in the processes about to unfold. After taking positions around the circle, a walk through the seasons on the ground map of the fabric Wheel lying in the centre of the room draws attention to the changing value between dark and light as essential to life on Earth as it is for the Southern Hemisphere. In walking through the symbolic Wheel of the Year, the intention is to remember psychically and physically sense the dynamic interdependence between dark and light - the light held in the dark, and the light having a point of darkness at each of the seasons. It is vital to give equal weighting to both light and dark phases, for as Livingstone puns on the word to suggest magical transformation, in a culture that ‘dis-spells’ the value of darkness, it is necessary to ‘spell’ the dark back into day and year (2005, p.157). Reminding workshop participants that the cycles on the Wheel have no beginning and no ending, and that each beginning contains within the seeds of a completion, the ‘journey’ is usually begun at the season after the one being observed. Arrival at the current season allows us to savor the gestalt, or moment of understanding, in all its dimensions and from all perspectives: the significance of the festival being celebrated, the stages it took to get here and to fully recognise its bi-polar opposite, in the act of creation through dark and light.
The Mystery that is the process of creative transformation in Earth’s cycles of light and dark is experienced in sequence with our personal mini-cycles: our self in place, our emotions and perceptions, enlivening our sense of belonging and contextual identity. The Wheel may be perceived as a mandala to the psycho-spiritual circuit between creation and destruction, in deep relationship to the creative process of both self and other as Source. The following is my structural format for the multifarious ways Earth’s cycle of creative process on the Wheel of the Year can be expressed and lead to a further uncovering of an imaginary for a spirituality that uncovers self in identifying with other, giving place to a life-affirming creative symbolic. Drawing on a wide variety of sources and influences for the inspiration for this adaptation of the Wheel of the Year, as well as my own growing understanding through its observation in my own life, the cycle describes the Creative Process, from the point of returning to the dark seasons that follow Lammas (Mabon and Samhain) for the renewal of inspiration, the urge to create (Yule, Imbolc) to growing manifestation (Easter, Beltane and Litha).

**The Wheel of the Year: a new-archaic imaginary for the creative process**

The vision of the Wheel of the Year as a symbolic for a creative imaginary for our times became clearer as I recognised it as one that gives a sense of embodiment and embeddedness in nature, mutuality in reciprocity and difference in unity, that encourages a maternal/menstrual logic and a sense of our interaction with and participation in the Creation Story of the Universe that we are helping to write. During the period of the life of this project, I re-searched and re-turned to correspondences others have made in order to taste the fullness of Earth’s creative urgency that I was sensing, and realised the creative potential in the

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32 Mandalas are known to take various shapes, but usually form a circle within a square, symbolising the unity of the life force. They are considered mystical maps of the cosmos intended for contemplation and to convey spiritual insight. They often refer to a cyclic view of life and nature, can be made in any media, and are often destroyed after construction (Walker 1988, p.10). My quilt *The Coincidence of Opposites* takes the form and has the purpose of a mandala; it is ‘destroyed’ by being taken down, as well as having the facility to be rotated and hung from each of the four sides according to season, thus altering perception of it and our relationship to what it represents, namely the Wheel of the Year.
wide variety of interpretations and applications given to Earth’s Wheel of the Year.

The agricultural metaform used to describe the Wheel of the year is evident, though expressed in their unique ways by Demetra George in Mysteries of the Dark Moon and Caitlin Matthews in The Celtic Book of Days, in which she describes the vegetation growth cycle as manifesting the psycho-spiritual phases in the creative process. She summarises these vegetal phases as ‘rest(ing), sprouting, burgeoning and fruit(ing)’ (1972, 1995). A poster designed by Robyn Francis for the Permaculture Education Centre in Nimbin, while agricultural in intent, also reflects the human celebratory spirit of each season (1996). The Esoteric Bookshop published another calendar poster of the Wheel based in Wiccan paganism, situated in the South while showing the comparative festivals in the two hemispheres (1998). It includes astrological signs, and associates the four elements with the senses: Earth is touch; Fire is the power of sight; Air is smell and Water is taste. Yet another approach to coming to know our relationship with Earth at a deeper level came form a group of women calling themselves the Sisters of Gaia, which has developed a Wheel of the Year to celebrate native fauna at different seasons, making correspondences between the Earth’s seasonal moments and the physical characteristics, habitats and habits of animal and bird life in parts of Australia (unpublished).

Rooted firmly in observation and experience, these interpretations of Earth’s creating Wheel have sent out shoots that curl and entwine with each other, sending up from roots anchored in the soil, the fruiting of an awareness of a perceiving consciousness arrived at auto-chthonically. I have re-formed and re-constructed under-standings of the awe of the Creation Story in which I participate as integral member through my own creative art practice and observance of the seasonal cycle. Nevertheless, the story remains ‘open-ended, an indeterminate story of possibilities’ for the practice of a flourishing natality and biophilia, because … ‘where beginnings and ends are cyclic, cosmogony is a
continually renewed promise of transformation and new beginnings… of a truly pre-patriarchal, non-colonised time and space… the beginning of all possibility.’ (Raphael 1996, p.266)

The Wheel of the Year expresses the meta[ph]ormic principle as both symbol for and embodiment of the Creative Dynamic. Remembering that there is neither beginning nor end, and contained in each stage of the cycle is its polar opposite from which it takes rise, the following summation of the Wheel of the Year contains the main elements of how it was explained in the workshops, expanding on the significance of the seasons as outlined in Chapter 1. It is a synthesis of perspectives, inspirations and expressions of how the Wheel of the Year may be experienced as the interdependence between dark and light for Creation and the effect of these natural rhythms on the personal psyche. As such it represents the creative process for an auto-chthonic feminist creative imaginary. I am beginning this version of the creation story at Mabon, or Autumn Equinox, the season moving into the period of deepening darkness, at the point of balance when the creative process has come to fruitful completion, the last harvest is being gathered, and there is remembrance of loss and preparation for renewal. (Further correspondences that provide added dimensions of significance to seasonal observances are offered in the form of a table on pages 138 -142.)

- **Mabon** gives thanks for all that has gone before at the final harvest of the cycle, and prepares to return it to the dark’s power for renewal into the next creative round. The profusion of ideas and inspirations residual from the completion of a project are gratefully collected and stored. In this time of equal balance between light and dark, there is a sense of loss accompanied by a deeper [g]nowing that the creative potential lies dormant, is only hidden. The descent into darkness is welcomed in understanding the inevitability and necessity of this stage of the journey for further Creation to become manifest.

- **Samhain** begins the darkest phase of the Year, and of the creative cycle, a time to look inward and rest. At this point of profound dissolution, present past
and future meet to create the new. It is a time of remembering that which has
gone before in our own lives, the natural and cultural changes of the ‘big
picture’ and the transformation that comes with change and death as the
conceiving of that which is not yet known, the yet-to-be-manifest. That which
only recently gave such inspiration dissipates into darkness beyond recall;
excess falls away and decomposes back into the great Void of All-possibility.
Although visible signs of creative inspiration are lacking, in the full darkness
within, tiny roots from seeds take hold and concepts flicker as the New Year
of the Creative Cycle envelops us in the nurturing potential of darkness.

- **Yule** stands at the stillpoint of the miracle that is new life conceived: the Sun
  is ‘born’ again from the previous passage into waxing dark, revealing the seed
  of light at this singular moment of deepest darkness. On the Creative Wheel,
desire conceived in the darkness is born, is sensed as a re-turn of creative
energies, a re-generation of the Creation in which we are participating. The
‘child of promise’, self as Creator is recognised as coming into being. It is time
to cast aside doubts and impediments that might prevent giving shape to
that which was conceived in desire for self expression, to make the dream
move towards taking form.

- **Imbolc** nurtures the still vulnerable and fragile emergence of the returning light
  and new life in its determination to come to full manifestation. New sprouts
emerge from the dark, in need of tending. On the Creative Wheel, it
encourages the self-expressive act of manifesting through the commitment of
the promise to self as the Source, and dedication to its completion, seen as
the return of productive energy that is quickening and strengthening. The
ability to see with integrity, from one’s own perspective strengthens intention
and brings new vision for manifestation of all that has taken place in the dark.

- **Easter** accepts the persistence of the light to continue to wax to full
manifestation, leaving the dark behind for three months after holding them in a
moment of balance. On the cycle of Creativity, there is no going back, yet in
the burgeoning diversity of forms the way forward is still not fully clear; the
Mystery persists. The understandings – the inner gnoring gained in the dark
strengthens a new perspective on Self-as-Source in the process of Creation. It is felt in the power to contain the complexity of ‘opposing’ positions with new clarity and harmony, bringing forth a dawning inspiration that gives new form to ideas.

- **Beltane** gives way to the fullness of light and celebrates the falling away of resistance to the life-force as it continues to wax unrestrained towards the festival of Litha. The fullness of light is needed for the seed to become fully manifest and find independent form so that it can re-turn to the fertile Source that springs from desire. At this stage of the creative cycle there is an urgency to make manifest unseen conceptions, and to passionately surrender to the form they will take. The creative process is a frenzied dance towards the fulfillment of our creative urges, one that cannot be restrained. That which began in the dark as an imperceptible desire to find personal expression blossoms, growing into fullness as the end of desire seeks its own dissolution in the productivity of the process.

- **Litha** senses the second stillpoint of birth on the Wheel, when Sun reaches fullest strength at the moment the seed of darkness is born. At this time of harvesting the fruits of our labours creativity takes full form, realised out of the interaction of light with dark as creative Source. Projects have ripened, take on independent identity and are released in their full expression on the creative cycle. Blissfully enjoying the fruiting process elicits satisfaction and the celebration of the generosity of the abundance of creativity in which we are enmeshed, as the fullness of light gives way to impending dark, promising the next round of the Wheel Creation.

- **Lammas** brings further harvest as Sun ripens the grain crops, which is cut to be transformed and consumed as food, to be stored as grain and the seeds collected for the next crops; summer’s fecundity and fruition lingers as light is transformed to dark. Lammas continues to bring the round of the creative process to completion by recognising the transformative powers of dissolution, of letting what has ripened fall back to Source. That which has enjoyed full expression for the moment, offers itself to be harvested, is sorted and
separated, seeding abundant possibilities for another round on the cycle of creating as another step into the darkness is the only choice. This is a powerful time on the creative Wheel to recognise that we are the process, enacting the process through our daily acts of creativity.

**Phase 2: Creating a place that is sacred: invoking the Elements**

The workshops start with the women and myself sitting round the symbols that give shape to the ritual circle, and surrounded by the images and quilts that cover the walls. As I have said, the purpose of the ritual circle is to create an environment in which the experience of working creatively with textiles can be an experience of the sacred. The creation of sacred circle is also a clearing, allowing distractions that stem from daily obligations to dissipate, to let go of surface particularities and re-connect to deep imaginings, to let visioning and visualising unfold. Though ritual proceedings vary for each of the workshops, they always include journeying round the seasons on the Wheel as creative Source, drawing attention to the waxing and waning of the light and dark; and the invocation of the elemental meta[ph]orms of Earth, Air, Fire and Water, through which creativity occurs. The Fifth Element represents the process that gives form to self-in-transformation within the creative process – and is, in fact at the centre of the Mystery that is Creation, through [g]nowing self as the Source in relation to the broader grid that connects All-that-is-other. 33

The creation of place as sacred calls us to remember the elemental powers of Creation. Understood by the ancestors to be the touchstone of Creation, the elements of fire, air, earth and water are the essential base matter from which to experience self as other. In ritual, each of the four elements is represented at the four quarters of the circle (usually coinciding with the solar festivals of Easter, Litha, Mabon and Yule). They form the second layer within the meta[ph]ormic

33 The formation of a ritual circle or altar is mostly referred to as creating sacred space. The word place can be inserted in its place as an indicator of a specific area, with all contained therein. This is to inscribe an indigenous sense of place in which the sacred is embedded. While space suggests an abstract, perhaps unbounded concept, the word ‘place’ is more specific and concrete.
Wheel, and are marked by a symbol that varies according to the theme chosen for each season. In the remembering and the invoking, the directional elements become another set of gateways or ‘hidden doorways’ through which we enter into an awareness of our participation in the creative interaction between space, time and matter (Matthews 1986, p. 48). Together they coalesce into the fifth element of a transpersonal identity that is the site at the centre of creational and transformational sacred place. This metaphor enables its re-cognition embodied in our own lives, in the self that is connected to and interdependent with the greater whole. By ‘remembering of our common origins…who we are and what we are, and from whence we come’ participants enter into ‘a deeper more basic reality of being’ that, in spite of the immensity of this realisation, provides a place in which ‘…it is safe to speak deep truths and be heard and known’ (Livingstone 2005, pp. 157-8). It makes me think that we could be sitting in seclusion with the menstruants in their huts, feeling the sacredness in self and other (see Grahn 1993).

In ritual circle for the Southern Hemisphere, the elements are called in a counter clockwise direction, since it is traditionally perceived as a movement in tandem with Sun, and therefore acknowledging an increase of creative powers. In the north, deosil (sunwise movement) or creative increase, is a clockwise phenomenon, since when facing Sun it seems to move, from appearing at dawn to setting at sunset, in a clockwise direction. In the south it appears the opposite. The Old English term widdershins is the balancing energy that acknowledges the union of opposites in the creative process perceived as taking place in a clockwise movement. However, it makes little sense to transpose these appellations to the Southern Hemisphere and would be more useful to experience an embodied way to make sense of them. When positioning the body to face Sun in the Southern Hemisphere, a sun-wise movement from east to west
can be seen to be anticlockwise, a movement that is, in fact, *deosil* - sunwise, life-giving and creative.\(^{34}\)

Such considerations as these make it clear that the spirit of the observation is more important than the attempt to fix and codify into cannon or text. So it is with the different ways of representing the four elements. Interpretation of appropriate correspondences between direction and the four directions is flexible. One participant said that for her the setting of the sun is the correspondence she makes with the elemental attributes of Air, although she remains open to intuitive responses in other different environments. Since we live on the East coast of Australia, with the vast landmass stretching westward, the energy of Earth may be associated with the West; and the space to the South of the island continent, lacking landmass until the Antarctic, can be envisaged as the energy of Water. In the workshops the approach tended towards more traditional interpretations, simply by inverting North and South to represent the hemispheric difference, with Water in the west and Air in the east, rather than taking on the bigger picture of the local environment.

Nevertheless, these processes do place us in the bigger picture as we remember the often unpredictable flow and interaction of these creative energies within ourselves. Each of the four elemental directions has symbolic correspondences with the cyclic creative process. The realisation that Air signals awakening consciousness as a conception with the beginning of each in-spiration makes it the breath of creativity. Fire gives rise to determined effort and as the energy of passion and will is the spark of creativity. Water holds the sometimes confusing wonders of our feelings, and is the flow and ebb of creativity. Earth provides the sense of grounding the creative process, and bringing it into form: it is the form of creativity. The Fifth Element holds all four in the creative mix that is at the centre

\[34\] I would argue that since in the south the increase of light energy is witnessed as a counterclockwise direction, *deosil* (sunwise) more appropriately describes a counterclockwise movement. It is possible that we might find alternative apppellations; or simply use the unencumbered terms ‘clockwise’ and ‘counter clockwise’. It might augment our sensibilities about where we are physically situated.
of self in relations to the Universe. These understandings became the basis for
the invocations to call the elements of Creation in the workshops, and the
following correspondences between the elemental powers and the solar sabbats
came to be used:

- **Air** energy is the breath of inspiration for the creative process. It comes to us
  symbolically in the dawn of each new day, and on the Wheel of the Year,
corresponds to the return of life in spring at Easter in September.
  ‘We remember that we are Air, the breath of Creativity.’

- **Fire** energy is creativity sparking into life. Following the festival of Beltane on
  the first day of November we watch the Sun rise higher into the sky. On the
  Wheel, Fire corresponds to the season of Litha, the celebration of summer’s
  solstice, when Sun’s creative powers reach a peak and start a descent on the
  path towards the dark half of the year.
  ‘We remember that we are Fire, the spark of Creativity.’

- **Water** energy corresponds to the flux of emotions felt whilst engaging in
  Creative Process; the confusions, doubts and exhilarations remembered in the
  balancing act experienced at Mabon.
  ‘We remember that we are Water, the ebb and flow of Creativity.’

- **Earth** energy is creativity taking form, evident in all material forms, (as well as
  their perception), and is honoured at the season of Yule on the circle.
  ‘We remember that we are Earth, the form of Creativity.’

- **The Centre** holds the energy of the Four Sacred Elements of Creation, and is
  the Heart of the Creative Dynamic of the Universe through which we access
  creative energies and form creative imaginaries.
  ‘We remember that we are all the Elements of Creativity: Air, Fire, Water and
  Earth – and much more.’

**The Fifth Element: Source of creativity**

On the Wheel, the site of Mystery is at the centre, the place of alchemical and
mystical transformation, where the other four elements come together in creative
fusion to bring forth new insights and different perspectives for another
manifestation of the self experienced as the creative spirit residing within. Envisioned at the centre of Wheel, expressing metaphor and arising as metaform, the fifth element is the hub from which spirals continual rounds of creation, destruction and re-creation in the turning. It is from this dynamic stillpoint at the centre that all matter and form, All-that-is-other emanates and to which it returns. It is imagined and en-visioned as the place that is at the same time past, present and future, nowhere and everywhere - where creativity is sourced, the place one enters in order to [g]now the Mystery. The centre as pivotal point is the site of Mystery, where the mortal and immortal, the visible and invisible are [g]nown, felt to arise in the same source and be capable of auto-chthonic creation by giving birth to self as Source – parthenogenetically as self-giving-birth-to-self-giving-birth-to-self in eternal cycles.

The fifth element is represented by a symbol at the centre of the ritual circle – at the central stillpoint of the Wheel. Symbolically it represents the place, time, identity from which all Creation emanates, understood mythologically as the void, the abyss. The abyss referred by quantum physicists as ‘the quantum vacuum out of which elementary particles emerge’ has been spoken of as ‘all-nourishing’, for the continuation of the original Creation, and envisaged as the space of mystery (Swimme 1990). As the site of the Mystery it is the site of magic, of imagining, where the unconscious and conscious minds imbricate resulting in a process of neurological re-patterning through the development and integration of the right-hemispheric patterning of the brain that includes intuitive and holistic spatial awareness. (Starhawk 1989, Schlain 1991, 1998) The part played by the imagination in ritual is through creating meaningful metaphors, metaphors that are accompanied by the willingness to change, to see differently. The Source of the imagining self, found in the abyss, is a willingness to create the self and other and be created through listening and reflexivity, bringing about and deepening self real-isation that occurs in mutual and reciprocal relationship. It a process that has been described as ‘the art of evoking power from within’ resulting in the power to alter will (Starhawk 1987, p. 6).
Often represented by a burning candle that is lit after the directions have been invoked, the fifth element at the stillpoint can be symbolised imaginatively in many ways. By invoking the fifth element we metaphorically step into the space of ‘the gap’, the nourishing place of All Creation, symbolised here by the *vesica piscis*, where it is fully dark at the season of Samhain. It is time to declare that we are ‘between the worlds’, the open formless place where we feel the energy of being in touch with all-possibility, where creativity bubbles up, and changes in consciousness manifest as changes in reality through the application of intention (Morwen Two Feathers in *Gaian Voices* 2005). The definition of magic is also a definition of art, and provides insights into the role of the creative process in creating and changing the world – for there, in the space in between, lies the power of creative change. At the Samhain ritual, as we remembered our central role in the Creative Process and the ever-present Fire within, we took the candles, lighting them from the candle of Fire in the North and placed them in the centre of the hollowed-out pumpkin, saying “We remember that we are Fire, Air, Water and Earth – and much more.”

The symbol for the Fifth Element as representative of self-in-Creation varies with theme and intention. Participants are invited to bring a symbol to place in the circle, which also contributes to the fifth element, representing relationship with self as creative self. For the celebration of Samhain (2002) the participants were invited to bring a piece of gold jewellery and a candle. At the centre for the celebration was a pumpkin, which, instead of having ‘eyes’ cut out in the traditional form of the Jack o’lantern, was filled with sand and surrounded by a fiery fabric mask, representing the unlimited possibility that lies hidden in the darkness. As suggested earlier, the mask was selected as a symbol for change and transformation, the point at which present, past and future meet…the point of reaching the hinge of the spiral, where death and life are one, where what has been consumed can be renewed, and All Possibility is quickened to new life by what has been (Starhawk 1989, p. 202).
As I have mentioned, there are layers of symbolism in each workshop, so there are layers of themes. The Wheel of the Year as creative symbolic is present in our lives as micro cycles that may be noticed and felt in many ways. Not least of these are our psycho-spiritual mini-cycles by which we re-create self and other. As indicated by the Samhain workshop for 2002 described above, the seasonal theme of descent to Source for renewal was augmented by a focus on the Element of Fire, linked to the Creative Process in which the ‘spark’ of creativity is almost ‘lost’ – hidden by the full darkness that is the season of Samhain. It is my usual practice as we journey through Earth’s creative cycle on the Wheel to ask the women to consider where they currently feel themselves to be in their own creative cycle.

It is appropriate at this phase of the ritual, after creating a safe place in which to share personal reflections, to invite participants to speak about the symbol they have brought to the workshop to put into the circle. The point at which this occurs during workshops is variable, but most often occurs after the elemental directions have been invoked and sacred space declared. It is an opportunity for personal reflection, and of giving witness to the others as members of our creative community for the day. It can be the tool that provides opportunity for actively participating in the ritual proceedings by sharing personal story and insights. It is also a powerful way of ‘raising the energy’, that is of bringing ourselves into being the creative imaginary we seek. On the occasion of the season of Lammas in 2002, for example, when the harvest of creativity is being celebrated, the suggestion was to bring a symbol ‘to celebrate your own harvest over the past 12 months; and consider ‘what seeds you are gathering for future planting.’ As does symbol, the question raised in sacred space brings into focus the themes for the season in the creative cycle and our personal creation story as an integral part in the bigger Creation Story. It may relate to memories of the past and desires for the future - a letting go and a rekindling of intention, which is shared in an entirely voluntary capacity.
Phase 3: Transforming: raising the energy for creative expressions

Naturally visual symbols are of great importance in a workshop in the visual arts. An ancient graphic symbol that I use regularly is the labyrinth, which is placed at the centre of the circle in workshops. In the absence of a ground labyrinth, it can be entered metaphorically through the use of visualisation. Both in western and other primal traditions, the spiral labyrinth (as opposed to the confusion brought about in the maze) is ancient symbol for finding oneself through a psycho-spiritual journeying between the worlds (Lonegrin 1991, Purse 1992). Walking the labyrinth, albeit metaphorically, when envisioned as an initiation involving the self-reflexivity that informs identity in relationship is a process of looking inwards towards the still point, where opposites meet as one. This is followed by a reversal to move outwards, without eliciting dualism, or the adversarial conflict that leads to either a dominating conquest or its binary, disenabling submission. This process is particularly important in the workshops to evoke the sense of self as the creative Source, and it is by this means that the energy is again raised for the transformational processes that can happen in ritual space – where ‘magic happens’. This is the stage in the ritual process the participants are assisted to find that sacred place in which they can feel their creative capacities in response to the inspirational input – finding themselves the Source of Creation.

There are many ways of doing this in ritual space. In the workshops this process takes the form of a brief period of meditation – or more accurately of visualisation, as a way of centering and connecting with the deeper self and the themes of each workshop in coming to the point of inspiration for our creative output. On all levels, actual and imaginal, it is important to involve the senses in order to fully engage creative energies: not only sight and touch, but also the senses of taste, smell and hearing, so that the body/mind/spirit is wholly engaged in the process. I make sure to include materials to stimulate all five senses in the physical space of the workshops, according to theme: music and incense, food and drink, posters and quilts to hang on the walls, visible, tangible and edible symbols, and of course the fabrics provide visual and tactile delight. The
visualisation is usually, though not always, presented as a journey, often set in a landscape scene to evoke visual, sensual responses. This short period of going within also takes the participants on a journey into their own psycho-spiritual landscape, through the sensuality evoked by memory and desire, from which they emerge ready to work on their textile fabrications.

The visualisations used are chosen to evoke visual imagery appropriate to seasonal themes, and evoke the imagination in forming a vision for self and other. While Goddess images are available to be looked at, their re-storying can be imagined through a creative visualisation. These archetypal images of woman as Goddess, or what have been referred to as ‘ancient mirrors of womanhood’, reveal the sacred creative cycle of destruction, creation, and transformation (Shinoda-Bolen 1984, Stone 1990) (see also images on pp. 153 - 7). Their stories may be recognised in each phase of the creative/life cycle embodied by the three bio-social stages of a woman’s life; they offer another dimension by which to contextualise the content of the workshops for those present. They present experiences of being woman that both strike a familiar chord and offer new insights. Such texts provide a situation in which to re-view and re-contextualise how the women might see themselves differently today by deconstructing and re-constructing the experiences and qualities of these earlier representations of the body and spirit of woman in relation to their own experiences and present context.

By re-visualising the stories of these ‘ancient mirrors’ for the festivals of the Wheel of the Year, we are placing ourselves powerfully and with openness at the centre of the creative process, at the pivotal point where the stories and symbols echo from the past into present hearing, giving voice to visions for the future. From this position we re-create ourselves as divinely feminine, giving new shape to our textile fabrications, and new perceptions to our worldview and imaginings. By raising the energy, they raise the stakes in the experience of being woman, and being divine.
Phase 4: Reciprocal sharing and communion

As I have indicated, the process of sharing as a small community of women gathered for the day with similar aspirations and goals – to create in fabric, is in itself a form of communion. It is traditional for patch workers to share their fabrics, through a wide variety of means. Sometimes this is done formally through the creation of a ‘friendship block’ by each individual in a group; the blocks are then brought together to form a whole quilt. At the seasons of Yule and Litha it is appropriate to include the act of gift-giving through fabric sharing, which in itself is a creative imaginary and symbolic form of communion whereby the fabric received enters into the creative process and is re-created into another round of Creation. Like the sharing of food, it reminds us that we are sustained by the reciprocity that gives shape to the Universe through the dynamic interaction of all-that-is-other as the creative process in which we take part.

In the ritual circle food offers another symbolic order by which to remember of the creative cycle on Earth’s Wheel. The creative process takes on a physical dimension in the sharing of food, symbolically at first sitting in the circle and later at lunch, during which time other forms of relational reciprocity are shared in lively conversation: as thoughts, feelings, ideas, impressions, and all that goes with enjoying food together. The sharing of food in ritual communion, where food that has formed part of the circle as symbol is consumed, reminds us of our interdependence with Earth’s fruits for sustenance – and indeed that we too are Earth’s fruits. A blessing often accompanies the sharing of the communion food, reminding us that each of us are embodied symbols (as metaphor and metaform) of the transforming fifth element, connecting us to self and other, meeting at the stillpoint of the Mystery. It is a time to feel the energy of gratitude and celebration, to relax a little and prepare to bring our creative urges to fruition.

Sharing textile experiences (and my teaching philosophy)

This is the stage of the workshop that all have been longing to get down to: to create a piece of textile work that is a unique response to and application of the
other ‘materials’ being presented. In my preparations prior to the workshops, I cannot foresee the creative designs that might arise from the themes and images presented in the ritual space. I nevertheless work with the inspirations the period of preparation provides, seeing the textile applications and techniques I offer as possible tools to facilitate personal creative responses. Relevance to the spirit of the season is the guide for making decisions about what techniques might be presented and several alternatives are offered, including guidelines for a more conventional patchwork block. I prepare a portfolio of quilt images, other stimulating images, possible technical applications and instructions with fabric samples that participants may consult.

Stimulus at this stage particularly may also be given by the visual input that is provided to raise the energy by the quilts that hang in exhibition on the walls. At each workshop, I usually hang three quilts that I have created to represent the Wheel of the Year: that of the season we are celebrating, and the 2 quilts made for the seasons either side. The sequence provides a perception of continuity within change - visual reminders that the seasons change and all is in a state of transition. The quilts also provide encouragement through the story that is attached to their creation, as well as being examples of the application of specific technical approaches. The influence of colour, examples of line, shape and form are also posted on walls and presented thematically. It is always my intention to encourage the sharing of technical knowledge and skills. Some of the women have been to many workshops in the textile arts. Often suggestions for textile applications will come from individuals within the group, or advice on colour combinations or design. Technical expertise is not the only reason for encouraging, even soliciting the advice of the workshop participants. I see it as a recognition and acknowledgment of skills, intuitions, and wisdoms too often unacknowledged by the individual herself. It also calls into question the conventional roles expected in a learning situation where the teacher as expert provides information to the learner as receptor. It may encourage the emergence of a feminist creative imaginary by providing the opportunity for experiencing an
alternative epistemological paradigm, a ‘women’s ways of knowing’: learning by means of recognizing, respecting and honouring individual attributes to be found in mutual relationship (see Belenky et al. 1986).

The technique that I prefer to demonstrate is often referred to as free-cutting, that is, cutting into fabric without measuring or using a ruler to provide a straight edge as in usual patchwork block formation. This can be quite a daunting proposal for some who are used to regulation and being in control. The physical movement, as the name suggests, can have a freeing effect on the artist’s capacity for expression, freeing up straight measured lines and shapes familiar in conventional patchwork in order to bring into form individual inspirations and ideas. Sometimes the construction of a conventional block using the free-cutting approach provides a stepping stone across troubled waters for those who have never moved outside the square of the conventional patchwork techniques, after which they never look back.

**Phase 5: Gathering in and spiralling out**

It is traditional in ritual practice to ‘open the circle’ in order to formally conclude the processes engage therein. As the end of the day draws near, we come together in the circle to show the results of our day’s work. This is the time for ‘show and tell’, for sharing techniques, ideas and processes – and that which might be considered a ‘mistake’, or to excitedly make future plans for the work that is starting to form. Each woman has worked at her own pace, on her own project, and it is the time to affirm each other and acknowledge our unique and mutual relationships in the craft of textile fabrications, and indeed in our life experiences. The women tell their creation stories. Sometimes advice from others is offered on how to proceed with their textile fabrications. They may share some personal insight forthcoming from the workshop about their psycho-spiritual. They may refer back to the symbol they placed in the circle and its significance in their creation. After a day of cutting and stitching, conversing and laughing (and maybe at times lamenting) in the sacred place that we have
created through ritual, it is time to return to our lives and routines, which are the extension of the sacred creative role we have just engaged in together. To open the sanctity of the circle, the themes of the day’s workshop are re-visioned, and creative presence is remembered in the re-calling of the directional elements. We may sing together, dance and hold hands, saying the traditional blessing in parting: ‘Merry meet, and merry part, and merry meet again. And blessed be.’

**The Soul Seasons exhibition**

Towards the end of the round of seasonal workshops in 2001, an invitation was sent out to workshop participants to be part of a *Soul Seasons* exhibition at the local community gallery. It was an opportunity for the women to take that extra step in the process of ‘show and tell’, completing the creative cycle begun in the workshops, from conception to full manifestation - to exhibit visually a creative feminine imaginary by envisioning a world for the world to see. Twelve women participated including myself, exhibiting a total of 27 pieces of creative textiles, both arising from the workshops and otherwise inspired. In this way the creative Wheel could again be seen to complete a turn, and though the women who participated were not asked for the sake of the research whether putting their work on exhibition had altered perception of themselves as engaging in the sacred work of Creation, the exhibition provided another opportunity to tell their creation stories. Their creation stories written for the catalogue indicated that for many of the women a growing awareness of the seasonal cycles and festivals had influenced their textile creations and their perceptions.

Some examples of these stories are provided here. Jennifer exhibited the works she had completed through attending all of the eight seasonal workshops on the Wheel of the Year and wrote of her sense of self in relation to Earth accordingly…

> At each celebration I made a quilt, which is now a calendar for me to bring into my personal celebrations for the rest of my life. In previous times our ancestors experience their lives interwoven with Earth’s cycles. These festivals were the magical thresholds between the worlds. This can liberate us from linear modes of time, reminding us that death yields to life
again and again. By being part of these natural cycles we can attune to the creative forces that flow through us, and learn how to live in harmony and balance with ourselves and Earth. With My Wheel of the Year calendar, I feel that I am now an integral part of this universal cycle.

The same woman, in describing the inspiration for another piece she created for the five Elements, entitled *Elemental Beings*, wrote...

My life as a mother involves structures, routines and timetables. These however are often thrown into disarray (often to the point of chaos) with the ebb and flow of living within the many roles I fulfill as a woman. This quilt represents the dichotomy between the structured and unstructured facets of my life. The process of creating the quilt highlighted the psycho/spiritual importance of textiles in my life. The creative process is vital for integrating and facilitating connection with myself and the universal Divine Feminine (sic). My life can thus be seen as part of a cycle within cycles, chaos within structure but always filled with mysticism.

Another exhibitor, Elizabeth, referenced her work, begun at the Winter Solstice workshop as

represent(ing) the quintessence of winter…time has slowed down to take the form of diamond “capsules” promising new life: order emerging from chaos.

She noted that the quilt entitled *Incandescent Dreams*

…brings together the light and the dark…to represent an interplay of the seen and the unseen. It attempts to combine and harness the hidden mysterious elements with the emergence of new energies to continue the ongoing cycle of seasons.

The workshops and group exhibition provided an opportunity for the women to give witness and to be acknowledged by being witnessed (a process engaged in the ritual of the workshops). Through the narration of her own story expressed visually in textile art, each woman acknowledged the right to their chosen means of expression in which no explanation of position is expected or needed. In taking the risk of exhibiting her artwork, she not only provides a perspective on ‘what already exists’, but through it is suggesting ways of ‘imagining what we and others can create out of what already exists’ (Christ 2003, p. 232). She is contributing to a new creative imaginary drawn from a synthesis of things that already exist, including, I would add, other people’s perceptions of her art. In
doing so, she is contributing to the re-cycling that is the process of the sacred Creative Dynamic of the Universe. She is helping to bring to consciousness the 'unacknowledged basis', material and maternal of the 'repressed binary' and to point to a gap between past and future – however close they may be, 'through which new possibilities can be glimpsed and pursued' (Jantzen 1998, p. 97).

The making and exhibiting of art, as is participating in ritual performance, is an act of the soul, made in the spirit of trust, which derives from and resides within the realm of the sacred within the 'immortal process' of the Wheel of the Year (Livingstone 2005, p. 153). Creativity is an awesome power that we can all lay claim to, and that enables conscious participation in eternal transformation that is the Creation story of the Universe. As artists we are 'involved with forces and energies larger than our own. We are engaged in a sacred transaction of which we know little: the shadow, not the shape' (Julia Cameron 1994, p. 205). Nevertheless, the shape and form we create does matter, as does the deity we worship *matter* in the sense that it quite literally *creates matter* (Feman Orenstein 1990, p. xvi, her emphasis). In presenting one’s story for others to see in visual form we are offering the sacred space of re-creation, one that brings up memories for self and for others, memories that may be in common, while originating from different backgrounds. Accordingly, it is clear that by giving witness to their stories through their art a space/place is opened up that has the power to transform values and bring the new into form. In spite of disparate backgrounds, their art quilts illuminate a doorway that opens up a different relationship between art, art-maker and viewer for the re-construction of story, for a new imaginary, for reversing the myth that keeps both artist and viewer at the effect of a dominant dominating author. The window is opened to the vision of a creative imaginary that mediates directly through the medium, rather than fulfilling the needs and expectations of the incumbent omniscient (male) genius presumed to be the source of creative activity and therefore Creation.
The Creative Wheel of the Year: additional correspondences

During the time of the research I found further layers of significance that gave further texture to the Wheel of the Year as representing the creative process. The table below sets out the relationships between dark and light phases in the seasonal cycle, the daily cycle, the phases of the moon; the four compass directions are aligned to the four physical elements as I envisage them from my locality on the East coast of Australia. Finally, it summarises the agricultural and psycho-spiritual aspects of a creative cycle to which Goddess imagery is symbolically assigned.

The four seasons in the dark half of the cycle (Lammas, Mabon, Samhain, and ending with Yule) are the festivals of metaphor. The four in the light half of the cycle are metaform. Of course both aspects are present throughout the creative process, yet it is possible to apportion emphasis at different points on the Wheel where one or the other may have particular relevance the festivals. I feel the presence of the meta[ph]ormic process through the cycle, but it could be said that the solar festivals of Yule and Litha, Mabon and Easter are places where this may be more intensely recognised, as the balance between dark/light waxing and waning is given witness in Earth's cycle. The four quarters can be seen as the two dark sectors, when the seed of darkness is born at Litha, and movement into the darkest part of the year in Mabon and Samhain; the new quarter brings the re-emergence of the light in Yule and Imbolc, which comes to fullness in the seasons of Easter and Beltane (see Figure 7, p. 97).

It is also possible to assign correspondences of this flow between the dark seasons and the light with the four ‘quarters’ of a daily cycle, and four phases of the moon: the day begins at sunset, with the last phase of the waning moon. At midnight the moon is invisible in the sky at the full dark phase; at sunrise, the moon returns into the waxing first quarter; and midday corresponds to the rising of the full moon. Each quarter corresponds to one
of the four sacred Elements of Creativity. In the second quarter of the dark, we may call on the ‘watery womb’ in which creation forms; Air is remembered with the promise and fragile return of life at Yule and Imbolc; at Easter and Beltane the strength of the Sun develops, and manifest form ‘sparks’ into flame; and at the quarter of the fullest light, Earth’s abundance is enjoyed. I am presenting the assignations to the quarters, placing emphasis on the creative energies of each Element as they are traditionally held and may be seen to activate the process of Creativity on the Wheel. Water is the Element associated with ‘inner dreams and visions, introspection, feelings and emotions, receptivity’; Air with ‘movement, change, beginnings’; Fire with ‘will, growth, enthusiasm, creativity, passion’; and Earth holds the energy that is ‘silent, solid, restful, mysterious, wise’ (McArthur 1998, p.107).

The final correspondences made relate to Goddess imagery: I have used the eight images from the Awesome Power Series because these ancient images of woman as Goddess embody the creative imaginary of biophillic natality that communicates visually as form and persona. Their titles are as they had been published in the posters, sometimes accompanied with an admonition to ‘dare’ or look with ‘clarity’, or a description of their attributes. Being whole unto themselves, containing all, they are of course adaptable to all seasons, and there are any number of other Goddesses through which these correspondences could be made. There are traditional indigenous associations made between Goddesses and seasonal celebrations, which I also made use of during the workshops. For example, Brigid of Ireland is often connected with Imbolc, ‘Feast of the Flame’, since she tended the fragile flame of new life. The story of Demeter and Persephone is often treated at the equinoxes, as the theme of loss and return. I have placed them in order to deepen my understanding of the spirit of each of the seasons.

35 Correspondences between the directions and the Elements can take a wide variety of associations in this large continent island. The points of the compass are of course associated with the rising and setting of the Sun, but the four sacred elemental powers for Creativity to happen on Earth are everywhere, which makes them flexible also.
within the Cycle of Creativity. Choosing correspondences is a personal process, which can be informative, and I found myself eager to explore some of the more ‘maligned’ Goddesses, such as Kali Ma, known as ‘the death wielder’, and Lilith and the Medusa of patriarchal mythologies.
ADDITIONAL CORRESPONDENCES
FOR THE CREATIVE WHEEL OF THE YEAR
In the Southern Hemisphere

SUNSET - RESTING
Last quarter of waning moon
SOUTH
WATER: I AM THE WATERY WOMB FROM WHICH CREATIVITY FLOWS

Autumn Equinox: 20 -23 March
- **Mabon: sorting and separating**
composts what remains from the harvest and returns it to the dark in
preparation for continuity into the next creative round
REAPING THE REMAINDERS, SORTING AND STORING: SENSING THE
ENSUING DARK

*Kali Ma: the compassionate one: destroying to create*

Hallowe’en: 30 April
- **Samhain: returning to the Source**
ends what has been completed in the previous cycle, and begins the darkest
phase of the creative cycle - the point at which present past and future meet;
it challenges us to trust the darkness of our unknowing, and re-turn to the
potential that is held in the not-yet-known.
RESTING, COMPOSTING, TRUSTING, CONCEIVING: SENSING THE
POSSIBILITY OF RENEWAL IN THE DARKNESS OF UNKNOWING

*Lilith: feared and fearless: gnowing deep wisdom*
***************
MIDNIGHT - SPROUTING

Full dark moon

EAST

AIR: I AM THE BREATH THAT INSPIRES CREATIVITY

Winter Solstice: 20 - 23 June

• Yule: coming into being
  reveals the seed of light after the deepest darkness has been reached; a
desire conceived in the darkness is born
TRUSTING THE DARK FOR DEEP TRANSFORMATION: NEW IDEAS
BEGIN TO FORM

She: in the beginning

Candlemas or Feast of the Flame: 2 August

• Imbolc: quickening of ideas
  encourages its expression, nurturing emergence as a perception of the yet
unseen, the concept is felt to quicken
DIFFERENTIATING INTO MANIFESTATION: COMMUNING WITH ALL
POSSIBILITY FOR A QUICKENING INTO FORM

Dove Goddess: infinite space, unlimited potential

*************
SUNRISE - BURGEONING
First quarter of waxing moon
NORTH
FIRE: I AM THE SPARK THAT IGNITES THE FIRE OF CREATIVITY

Spring Equinox: 20 - 23 September

• Easter: manifesting
persists with the urge to create, holding the potential arising from the
diversity;
ENTHUSIASM AND EXCITEMENT IN THE POTENTIAL THAT THE
DIVERSITY OFFERS: FORM MANIFESTS

Cycladic Goddess: clarity

Early summer: 31 October

• Beltane: feeling urgency
surrenders to the desire and (com)passion to give form to the Unknown
Source; the creative process swings into action
LONGING, DESIRE, PASSION, URGENCY: CHOICES ARE MADE FOR
THE NEXT STEP WITH WILD DELIGHT

Snake Priestess: dare
***************
MIDDAY - FRUITING

Full moon
WEST
EARTH: I AM THE FORM THAT CREATIVITY TAKES

Summer Solstice: 20 -23 December

- **Litha: coming into full form**

reveals the fruits taking solid form out of the previous time spent in the
darkness of unknowing

CELEBRATING, REJOICING IN COMPLETION: FULL MANIFESTATION
OF IDEAS FOR ALL TO SEE

*Ishtar: holding fate in our hands*

Harvest of the grain (Lughnasad): 2 February

- **Lammas: seeding all possibility**

gives thanks for the completion of the creative process brought to full
expression, as product to be shared and harvest consumed; the next cycle of
creativity is set

REVIEWING, GATHERING: SEEDING ALL POSSIBILITY

*Astarte: see through me*

***************
Figure 9: Goddess imagery for the Creative Wheel of the Year

**KALI MA**
Watercolour, India, 20th century

*I destroy to create:
I am the compassionate one*

**LILITH**
Terracotta relief
Sumeria c 2000BCE

*Feared and fearless Lady of the Night
Tamer of wild beasts and Adam’s first wife,
She refuses to submit to oppression
and invasion.*
VENUS OF WILLENDORF
Austria 25,000 BCE
Natural History Museum, Vienna, Austria

Her fullness goes beyond fertility – it speaks of abundance of spirit and unconstrained life.

GODDESS WITH DOVE CROWN
Terracotta, Crete 1300 BCE
Heraklion Museum

From the peace and prosperity of ancient Crete, She flies to the centre of being and connects with the infinite within.
MARBLE WOMAN OF SPARTA
6000 BCE

She folds Her arms and stands secure,
with clarity and firmness of being.

SNAKE GODDESS
Faience
Palace of Knossos, Crete 1600 BCE
Heraklion Museum

With shakes as Her sacred companions,
She dares to use Her Psychic vision and transforming power.
ISHTAR
Terracotta
Sumerian c 1500 BCE
Louvre Musées Nationaux

Loving and beloved, yet
powerfully alone,
She is the fountain of both
sexuality and knowledge
‘The fate of everything she hold
in her hands.’

SEER
Phoenician Ivory
Kalach-Nimrud
8th century BCE
Iraq Museum, Baghdad

See through me
Following Her line of sight
We reach beyond the boundaries.
MEdUSA

Syracuse Museum, Sicily
I turn your face around!

It is my face.

That frozen rage I must explore –
Oh secret, self-enclosed, and ravaged place!
This is the gift I thank Medusa for! (May Sarton)

Figure 10: The Litha altar for the 2000 celebration. The theme of the rose is evident in the symbols used: small images of roses are placed at each seasonal point on the circle; the four Elements are sense-related, with rose water infused in the bowl of water at the West, full ripe peaches represent Earth in the South, a tea-rose ‘eau de parfum’ in the East for Air, and a rose scented candle in the North. At the centre is a wreath of roses, representing the reciprocity of relationships shared in inter-subjectivity. Candles are lit from the Litha candle and placed in the centre of the wreath to symbolize the fullness of light – the completion of our creative endeavours in the cycle of Creation, and symbolized by our celebration of the season.

Figure 11: Images at the workshop - of roses, galaxies and star clusters. The Australian native flowering gum provides another colourful symbol of coming into full blossom.
Figure 12: Jennifer’s complete Wheel of the Year. Samhain is at the centre front, and moving counter clockwise, are Yule, Imbolc, Easter, Beltane, Litha, Lammas, and Mabon.

Figure 13: The base cloths for ritual circle. The base cloths representing the dark and light halves of the Wheel of the Year, on which the symbols are placed for each Sabbat. The Sabbat of Litha is in the foreground, at the point where the dark half of the Year begins.
Figure 14: The Wheel altar for Samhain 2002. Symbols include a bowl of lolly snakes at Yule (Earth); golden orb at Imbolc; dragon at Easter (Air); iron pyrites at Beltane; submerged candle at Litha; halved apple at Lammas; string of garnets at Mabon (Water); and bowl with split pomegranates at Samhain, to be shared as communion. At the centre is the “masked” pumpkin, containing the lit candles, symbolic of Self-in-Creation. Autumn leaves and golden scraps of fabric lie within the circle.

Figure 15: Quilts hung for Samhain “Season of the Rose” (Litha); “Hecate’s Cloak” (Samhain); “Inner Sanctum” (Yule)
Figure 16: Jennifer’s Sun Wheel
Brigid’s Cross in progress at the Imbolc 2001 workshop, using a combination of conventional log cabin block at the centre, and free-cut borders.

Figure 17: Elizabeth’s cut-back work for Beltane 2001, representing the wild woman in her strength given visual expression.
Figure 18: The Imbolc altar of 2002, remembering the self as creative Source

Figure 19: Images for the Imbolc 2002 celebration, showing the labyrinth and the declaration:

*I am She. I am Goddess.
She is in me and I in Her.
I am Goddess Creator. What I create matters.*
Following the celebrations of the Summer Solstice, season of fullness, be prepared to harvest the abundance of your creativity!

The spirit of the ancient seasonal festival of Lammas is enjoyment of fulfillment, accompanied by a readiness to start the journey into the dark, to light the spark in search of renewed creativity.

In the season of Lammas abundance is harvested, our own and Earth’s. It is a time of being ripened by the fire of Sun, of gathering and grinding the collected seeds, of leavening the flour with the sparks of our dreams and visions, and of baking the mixture in the fires of the creative process.

Harvesting is a process of hard work which brings intense pleasure. From now on, day by day, the minutes of light grow less, and we remember the universal story of the creative journey which brings transformation through encountering the spark in the dark.

As we gather the fruits of the harvest, the seed of creativity is again planted, fired by the trust we have in the powers of gestation held within darkness.

Join us in celebrating the season in which we remember the Harvest ~ and make plans for that of the next cycle ~ through our shared love of creative textile design
Welcome to the workshop for Imbolc 2002

*as the thread of light is re-woven into our creative textiles*

Following the rebirth of the Sun at the Winter Solstice, signs of light and life are emerging as daylight hours slowly grow, and wattle comes into blossom. You are invited to bring a sense of connection with Earth’s returning creative urges, urges which encourage us to draw aside the veils of the deep dark, and to welcome a new round of creation sparked from our innermost selves. Come ready to shine with the light of dawning creativity, and to prepare for the great burst of regeneration, the assurance of renewed life at Spring.

Given that Imbolc is the season of the inner spark of Self becoming a strong flame, be prepared to be surprised by what may show up for you creatively - for the unknown or long-hidden to become manifest! It is not necessary to come with a textile project in mind. You may wish to finish off a project already begun, or to start out on something totally unexpected. The creative spark may become evident as something wearable - a head-piece, cloak, veil or stole; or as a personal adornment - a brooch or ornamental collar. It could be the beginnings of a wall-hanging, or a quilt.

**SEWING NEEDS AND OTHER EMBELLISHMENTS**

- In your choice of fabrics to bring, remember the gentle determination of the returning energy of light: prized bits and pieces stored in your treasure chest, exotic fabrics and threads which glisten and shine; or if you prefer, simple cottons which evoke light and renewed life energy. They can all provide a quickening of inspiration.
- If you choose to do collage work, it will be necessary to have a measure of Vliesofix (a double-sided glue medium); a light-weight iron-on vylene is useful to stabilise polyester fabrics.
- Make sure your machine is in good working order, and you have spare needles, bulb etc; (bring needles, scissors, embroidery threads, etc for hand work, if you wish.)
- Wear comfortable clothing, and bring some food to share for lunch. (Coffee & tea provided.)
- Bring a personal item symbolic of your unfolding creative self.
The interview guide

The following is not intended as a workshop evaluation exercise - though feel free to add comments accordingly if you wish. Its purpose is to consider how the creative process may have transformed your perceptions of yourself as woman, your creativity and what you might consider sacred in your life. The following prompts might help the river of soul memory flow.

Workshop(s) attended:

If you have finished the textile piece(s) started at the workshop(s), now might be a good time to take it out and do a little more work on it, or simply sit with it and see what comes up into your consciousness….

- What memories/feelings come up about the process of its creation?

At the beginning of the workshops, we talked about the Wheel of the Year, and the significance of the particular seasonal celebration.

- Did this information affect your understanding of the seasonal cycle in any way?
- Have you noticed any perceptible changes in the way you feel about the seasons/seasonal cycle since then?
- Do you relate the seasons with the calendar of cultural/religious festivals? Has this changed in any way?
- Thinking about the relationship between light and dark as intrinsic to the creation of an image, have the workshops altered your usual perceptions in any way?

We sat in ritual circle and created a safe/sacred space, mindful of the symbols in the circle; there was usually a visualisation exercise.
• Do you remember any imaginings, symbols (perhaps the one you brought to the circle) or activities which may have brought you in closer touch with your creative/spiritual energies?

Another aspect of the workshops is the inclusion of visual images, viz: **images of ancient (Goddess) women** and telling their mythological stories in the formation of our cultural heritage. There were also often **images of Earth and nature**.
• Did these images awaken a different/new/stronger sense in you of what it is to be woman? To be an ‘earthling’ - in developing a stronger sense of relationship to place?
• Could you relate to these images/stories of Goddess women in a spiritual or personal sense?
• How would you describe such a sense? Could you give it a name?

Overall, the workshops are presented as an opportunity to awaken **our creative and spiritual self as women** to the sacredness of all we are and do.
• How did you decide on the textile work you started in the workshop? What steps did you go through in coming to a decision? What were the main influences on your choice?
• Is the visual modality (use of images and symbols) as a way of learning and knowing familiar to you? Can you say in what way it might affect your worldview and sense of self?
• What ‘senses’ (other than sight) did you engage in creating your work?
• Did the workshop experience offer a space in which to explore another ‘way of looking’ - at yourself, your creativity, your spirituality, the Earth?
• If this happened, can you identify the process(es) by which you took up this opportunity then - and since?
• Were you satisfied with the (started) textile piece? Have you continued with it? … finished it? What are your feelings about it?
PART 2

Women’s witnesses to the creative process

The women who were interviewed with regard to their participation in the creative process in the Soul Seasons workshops provide strong testimony to the emergence of a spirituality of creativity experienced and expressed through their own acts of Creation. Their words are included in this analysis to give ‘voice’ to this testimony, embodied through the creation of their ‘visible voices’ in textiles. I am grateful to the women who agreed to tell their stories, which so often revealed much more about themselves and the process of creating than simple answers to a set of questions could do. Though all from an Anglo-European background and having similar socio-economic backgrounds, their religious affiliations, experiences and explorations were varied and there was a wide spectrum of interest in the various avenues for spiritual expression and personal growth. Many had an understanding of and interest in Jungian approaches to psychotherapy and other more alternative modes for healing and wellbeing. Few had any understanding of feminist spirituality as Earth-centred or having a focus on the metaphor of a Divine Feminine. The Wheel of the Year as a space for creating ritual was a new experience.

There was one woman who had awareness of Easter’s pre-Christian origins, and though aware of the seasonal cycle...the contrast in the seasons is very important to me’. However their relationship to church liturgy was never evident: ‘I don’t think we had a sense of the significance of ritual. We were told to do it and we did it.’ She spoke of using patchwork as a means of integrating a ‘sense of the light and the dark in myself’. Before attending a workshop, Esther had created a crazy patchwork in black and gold in which ‘the light and dark of myself came into a whole. I accept that I have my shadows and my dark side...putting them together and seeing them as one created quite a lovely image, and was very satisfying.’ In spite of an understanding of Jungian archetypes, she does not relate easily to ‘goddess women’ believing that it is because ‘I don’t know my
mythology.’ But symbols are important for her, and engender images. Esther was able to see at the workshop she attended ‘how important creativity is for women.’ And that the creativity occurred on ‘a deeper level’ through celebrating ritual, ‘bringing our creativity out, acknowledging it and giving thanks for it was really important.’

There were those women who attended only one or two workshops, but were nevertheless vocal in their interpretations of the experience. Helen was the only woman who was well-versed in the use of Wheel of the Year symbolism and Goddess in ritual context. She had come to the workshop ‘…because I wanted to create something in fabric that related to my spirituality’, thinking it was ‘a really nice way…of learning about how we could use our creative energies to celebrate the Wheel of the Year.’ Helen was aware of the creative energy provided by ritual space, a space she vocalised as moving ‘beyond the external space of the everyday world another world that lies in me…that connects to the universal energy, and that allows me to open up’.

**Patching an analysis**

As I sort through the interview connections using five of the colours of the rainbow to decode and encode the witness of the women I feel a deep connection with them. Though I have not kept in touch with most of them, I feel the energy that is made available in the ebb and flow of our communications through our interaction in the workshops, and the thoughtful responses offered in the interviews. Reading their transcripts is grounding and brings me back full circle to the initial inspiration for undertaking the process. The energy to create a new viewpoint derived from and empowering women is stirred again in the process of reading, interpreting and passing on their stories. It is exciting, in a similar way to seeing an exhibition of the quilts hung. As colours come together, collide, enmesh, blend and contrast to form the whole pattern, so do the discreet items of story that I highlight – green for creative process’ is underlined with purple for ‘relationship’, and the orange for ‘embodiment’ blends with the pink for
‘symbols and ritual’. I am also aware that the ‘quilt’ that is being formed by this process is not simply definitive of the women themselves, but as a quilt, will take on different meaning and form depending on the perspectives of the recipients. The pattern that takes shape is a rich tapestry, detailed and defining. What is required is an attentive listening that is beyond hearing, and a visualising beyond seeing. What I saw and heard both through the interviews and in my reflections on the workshops has been collated under six themes that have emerged as expressions of an imaginary for an emerging consciousness of personal agency by the women in their experiences of being in the act of Creation during the ritualised space of the workshops. These themes bring form to the qualities of creativity according to the Wheel of the Year experienced:

- in connection to place and embedded in nature
- as cyclic process
- as a template for creativity
- arising in, and expresses relationship in reciprocity
- as transforming
- as participating in the Mystery as an act of the Divine in Creation

**Creativity experienced as embodied and embedded in nature**

A developing connection to a sense of place and self in place through workshop participation becomes evident from the comments made in the interviews. One of the workshop participants describes herself as ‘someone who now lives in the largest city in Australia, in air-conditioned buildings, who buys fruit and vegetables when they are out of season. The workshops allow me to reconnect with nature, the seasons, my Celtic and Norse origins and my childhood in the bush’ (Deni). Katherine says that ‘…working with the cycles of sun, earth and moon helps my connection with the earth.’

Jennifer, who completed her own personal set of eight quilts for the seasonal cycle, felt ‘an amazing sense of achievement’ in doing so. She reports that having her own ‘seasonal calendar, one that has been transposed to the
Southern Hemisphere, has facilitated an interaction with my environment that was not there prior to the workshops… the seasons don’t slip by and have a different significance for me now. I am aware of the purpose of the seasons relating both to an environmental nature and my personal nature.’

Some women brought an understanding of their connection to the rhythms of nature with them. Katherine said that she came to her first workshop because the autumn colours in nature at the time inspired her. ‘I was looking for a way to express my connection with the season… to feel it moving through me.’

Mentioning how this perception of the creative process ‘takes the abstract out of it’, reiterates thoughts offered by Deni, that …‘because we don’t grow our own food we need to bring into our home and life something tangible and physical – something practical, not just a concept. We can’t understand things just with our mind. We have to know it experientially: that’s how I know it… by allowing my body to recognise what it needs.’ She concludes with the observation that ‘this capacity to connect with our bodily responses is what is lacking in Christianity.’

Connected to this theme of an embodied, beyond binary perception of the seasonal cycles was the question relating to the dark and the light halves of the cycle. Jennifer is clear in her response: ‘the workshops have enabled me to feel comfortable with embracing both the light and the dark. My upbringing in the Christian tradition meant I had to focus on the light, but for me now the dark is just as important. It is the time for me to withdraw inward, to assess where I am going, a time for healing, and a time for self.’ It is interesting that Jennifer also describes how she ‘became aware of what I did see and what I didn’t see…the workshops suddenly made me aware of the subtleties of colour, and the fact that because of my European heritage the colours from imported trees grabbed me more.’ She describes feeling ‘a new attunement with colour’, at the same time as realising that ‘though I’ve lived here all my life, the subtlety of the seasonal changes in the Australian bush has not yet permeated my being (like if I was Koori woman).’ Nevertheless the creation of the eight quilts for a European
reckoning of the annular cycle has heightened Jennifer’s ‘sensitivities…I find myself noticing things more, and realise that maybe I can incorporate the seasonal changes into my being in the place that I am living. I now notice the subtle colours of the sky, which I wouldn’t have if I hadn’t gone through the process of recreating it in textile form.’

**Creating in cyclic process**

Walking through the seasonal cycle became a familiar pattern for those who attended the workshops regularly. Katherine says that she relates ‘the creative process very much with the natural cycle.’ It is interesting that she mentions that she is seeing ‘the seasons as different from the seasonal festivals, because I work with the festivals as being more than seasonal, but I can relate to them in both ways without having to be exclusive of one for the other.’ This comment seems to point to a recognition of the significance of the metaphoric dimension of the seasonal Wheel of the Year, not yet fully psychically (meta)formed or embedded by being in the Australian context. Jennifer writes of ‘the seasons as a way of connecting the past with the present and with the future. My life has taken on a circular pattern rather than a linear one.’ She also states that as time went on she ‘planned her life’ so that she could participate in each of the seasonal workshops, and ‘gave myself the whole day to create and be *me.*’

Again, Katherine saw her creative process working on many levels, enabled by the ritual circle and the use of symbols, which ‘say so much more than words, they are like a spark’. She nevertheless concedes that there is also need for definition and limitation, which occurs through the use of words. In explaining the way the workshops’ structure provides ‘the possibility of expression on so many different levels, many more than a conventional approach to teaching patchwork, she nevertheless recognises ‘the door that opened emanates from the inner self.’ She describes the effect of being in ritual space as providing the opportunity for expanding creative expression through ‘be(ing) able to let go of individualism, yet on some level retain it.’
Ritualising creativity for the Wheel of the Year

For Katherine ‘the ritual process provides a centre, a space for sharing – a bringing together as we go out and come back; very different from sitting in a circle and gossiping. I’m aware of the sense of sacred space, a space which drops into deeper space, where the creative work comes from’. The ritual circle, symbols, and visualisation were important to Jennifer: ‘because I’d always arrive with no idea of what I would produce…the circle always provided me with the creative inspiration for what I wanted to gain spiritually as well as creatively by the end of the day.’ Symbols took on new meanings, and visualisations helped her to move ‘out of my head…to a feeling a connection, which would in turn evolve into something made with my hands.’

The space created at the workshops by ritual has been important for Jennifer in realising her inherent creativity, which she describes as ‘a seed that has always been imbedded, which has been nurtured, and it blossomed.’ Jennifer recalls that her quilting ‘changed dramatically overnight and leapt into the realm of creativity instead of traditional patchwork, which had been my previous experience.’ She stresses that the ritual aspects – the centre circle, visuals and quilts brought to link the seasons, were ‘important’. ‘Intuition really came into play as something grabbed my attention; I got a feeling and went with it without any hesitation, trusted my instincts in trying new techniques and choosing fabrics.’ Starting as a process of relating differently to colour, the seasonal ritual space became much more. ‘It triggered off a metaphorical stage of my life in looking at who I am in relation to my environment, my matrilineal family, and connecting to who I am as a woman.’
Creativity as reciprocal relationships

As indicated by Jennifer’s comments above, for many of the women, coming to the workshops is about finding their own space to be themselves, to identify as woman with other women in group interaction, and to sense their connection to the spiritual aspect of their lives, and their integral connection with their own divinity. For Katherine the ‘feminine space’ is important. ‘My deeper feminine side requires an expression of identity through creativity. It’s saying “I am”, self-expression voiced strongly and loudly. Living out of the masculine a lot, (I have 4 boys,) I don’t often get the opportunity to heal my feminine side. I feel very nurtured by the atmosphere of the workshop, the women and the food.’ Jennifer comments that ‘…it was great listening to other women’s stories. I was also reintroduced to natural objects that were significant to the other participants. I learned more about simple flowers and objects.’

All of the women interviewed realised the gap in their lives created by lack of women’s stories that ‘connect us to a deeper more comprehensive sense of self as a whole woman’, as one woman phrased it. As Katherine continued, the term ‘whole woman’ seemed to indicate a need for connection to not only her own mother, but to the past ages of womankind. ‘

As a woman I have felt cut off from my roots. I had no women’s stories in school… and Christianity has woman as either virgin or whore. It doesn’t allow our humanness – we can’t give birth, or enjoy sex… we have to cover up our lives. It is such a loss…because our images and stories are our ancestors… woman is more than biology. Creating life out of her body is beyond the male/female rivalry for domination or equality.

The practice of sharing in a manner of reciprocal generosity that is not patronising is important to the women. Relating to the facilitator/participant interactions in the workshop scenario, Jennifer refers to the ‘reciprocal roles of student/teacher, where the roles are reversible’ as ‘part of the learning process for women.’ Katherine suggests that teaching techniques are not what it’s about; that’s just the outer side. ‘It’s disempowering for the teacher to be perceived as
the expert. We need to deal with the inner – to make a bridge between the two, since both are important. You can get techniques from magazines - I was so inspired from the workshops that I bought patchwork magazines.' She suggests that ‘it is only a question of time until the need to have both technique and inner spiritual and emotional aspects recognised in the workshop situation, and adds that ‘working with colour as the basis of my inspiration opens the third eye for me, and workshops approached through traditional structures would not do that.’

The challenge to come back to the inner self as creator, embodying every aspect of the body/mind/soul dynamic was commented on by several of the women. The corresponding lack of ‘seed’ on the spiritual level (‘I feel the seed was not there’) to presence of the seed of creativity that Jennifer describes above as being nurtured in the workshops was a consistent underlying theme. This desire for her ‘inner self’ as creator of her universe to be expressed fully in her textile expressions was stated by Jennifer as ‘a planting of the seed’, which took root in her pursuit of understanding and further knowledge about goddess imagery and story, and often inspired her quilt making. Like the introduction to a relationship between creativity and the seasonal cycles, the ritual element of calling the directions, goddess story and imagery, ‘was the first time I’d heard somebody talk this way. I’d never, ever thought that these aspects were related to my creativity...for the first time in my life I was thinking where did I fit? I realised I loved winter, and I walked out of that first workshop thinking why do I like winter?’ It was an ‘intuitive response’, one that she kept thinking about, and seemed ‘not just in relation to the seasons but also another process that was going on, one that was related to the ritual.’ She realised that ritual space ‘provided a completely different dimension' to her creativity,’ and remembers producing a quilt that was totally different from anything she had ever done before. The process set in place ‘a very passionate drive to learn more...it sort of instigated a quest...being introduced to a whole range of goddesses, and afterwards I would research more about them. Having been brought up in the Protestant tradition,
being presented with deities relating to my gender, to my femininity, to my woman-ness was such an (new) experience for me.

The use of goddess imagery and story is woven into the ritual process, and invites a new way of perceiving self as woman. It is noted above that Deni felt a reconnection to her Nordic background. While Jennifer was ‘fascinated by the global connections between the goddesses and (was) struck by their cross-cultural similarities,’ others preferred more culturally specific story and image of goddess. ‘I deepen relationship with goddess through being specific (rather than multicultural), feeling more culturally attuned to those of Greek and Celtic origin.’ Like Katherine and Deni, Jennifer connects to Goddess story and imagery through culturally familiar story and family background, and her matrilineal heritage, giving the Welsh goddess figures, Rhiannon and Cerridwen particular relevance. The third dimension influencing her relationship to goddess is her personal situation, where the ‘cultural thing doesn’t seem relevant; it is where I am at on a particular occasion.’ For example on returning to study, Jennifer notes that ‘Sophia fascinated me with her connection to wisdom. Being involved with academic studies I felt I could draw upon her strength in my hours of need.’ She states that she is unable to ‘talk about it in a logical way’, saying that the attraction to a particular Goddess happens ‘on an emotional level, not a rational one.’

The three ways in which Jennifer names how she ‘has come to see the Goddess’ resonate strongly with a theology that explains Goddess in a variety of ways: as an idea, as a real divinity, or something in between, in which a sense of Goddess can be experienced in and through the many names of historically and geographically situated diverse goddesses (Raphael 1999). Jennifer (and others interviewed) reiterates the tendency to personify goddesses by

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36 Furthermore, Raphael makes the point that by adopting those that embody values ‘most relevant to them at a particular stage of life’ often requires a reversal or adaptation of ‘world mythologies’, making possible deeply personal contemporary understandings of Goddesses as shape-shifters, ‘forming and re-forming’, in ‘complex, undetermined, ever emergent patternings and dissolutions’ (1999, p. 57).
acknowledging that Goddess is ‘someone who can be invoked in prayer when I need to become stronger, to feel my strength.’ Rather than imitating a patriarchal intention in personifying deity, the rationale for personifying Goddesses is another way to identify with divinity as embodied in self and other, and the intersubjective process that forms identity. Jennifer echoes the premise of an eco-feminist theology’s identification of the luminosity of the natural world, when she experiences an aspect of Goddess as ‘someone who is in all aspects of nature.’ Thirdly, in saying that the Goddess is ‘a metaphor for myself – the deepest aspects of myself,’ Jennifer is reverberating the wide range of pluralistic understandings that incorporate both the purely personal and the socio-political dimension for healing, renewal and social change experienced in ritual associations with Goddess identities. Her statement infers a common identity between the individual and Goddess, and ‘entails that no divine authority stands over and against the individual, who must own and name their sacrality’ (Raphael 1999, p. 61) This sensibility resonates in Jennifer’s statement that …after two years of doing the Wheel of the Year, I’ve come to realise that I am a woman; I’m a complex woman and I am really able to integrate this for the first time. And my relationship to divinity…well, if I’m made in the image of divinity, then the divine must be woman as well.

**Transforming (through) creativity**

For many women the creative process has been very liberating, and being creative in fabric provided a sense of freedom, as well as connection and rediscovery of self. ‘In returning to the creative process through painting I started to get another sense of myself,’ said Esther.’ Though she has worked constructing textile fabrications all her life, she expresses a realisation formed since attending the workshop that in using the medium of fabric ‘both hands are in touch with what I am working with,’ whereas holding the brush makes ‘a distance between me and the paper’. Her thoughts seemed to echo the words of Caitlin Matthews: ‘the work of our hands embodies our soul – leaving minds and hearts free as our hands are occupied’ (1997 p. 197). Katherine also notes ‘the different way of experiencing the creative process through making a quilt... which in painting or pottery is normally short, intense, with an immediate result. With the experience
of making a quilt a different approach to life opened up for me… because it is a
process that is connected, woven into daily life, sustained over time…it lives and
grow with me as woman and mother. It is a valid expression of creating from the
womb…it sits there, and you can feel it.’ She commented that ‘the workshops
opened a door in my mind; a door of self-expression that I hadn’t known was
there before. I am now seeing the creativity and beauty and joy in the domestic,
the mundane ordinariness of daily life.’

The presence of an element of challenge provided some of the participants with
the provocation to consider not only their personal role in the creative project at
hand, but how they themselves are in process of creation. ‘

I was challenged on a creative level, and I was challenged around my
concepts of divinity and my sense of self as woman. I have labelled myself
as daughter, mother, feminist; I’ve been a mother to five sons. I’ve been a
wife to two men. I am a business woman. I’ve been a teacher… In the last
two years, going through the process of the Wheel of the Year and finding
a relationship to colour and producing a quilt has made me much more
comfortable with myself as woman. I’ve been able to have a look at myself
as a woman, and I feel like I’m connecting… It’s the first time in my life I
am comfortable with who I am, and not worried about what other people
think.

Participating in the Mystery through creativity

As is indicated by her responses, summarised above, Katherine was one of the
participants who seemed well aware of the sacred in her life, its manifestation
through the creative process facilitated through her own creativity. ‘I’m not a good
verbal communicator, and working with the quilting process as symbolic
expression helps to touch deeper levels of the creative source…creativity works
in an unknown way, accessing levels of the subconscious.’ Jennifer also related
the sense of engaging in the mystery through the creative process in ritual:
‘…walking through the door was like stepping into another realm. I never knew
what to expect. I just brought my fabrics and machine, and I never knew what I

37 Katherine came prepared with 4 pages of hand-written notes made in the process of reflecting
on the questionnaire sent out a month previously. She preferred not to be tape-recorded, so I
took notes. The conversation took on a ritualized form in her wanting to have her autumn quilt
double bed size) opened out during our interview.
was going to produce at the end of the process, though it was always related to
colour. I have never had a relationship to colour like I have in those workshops.\(^{38}\)
The comments mentioned above that Jennifer made about noticing the colours of
the sky to re-create in her quilts, and beginning to see beyond what she is
accustomed to seeing, are indicative of a new sensibility and an awareness of
participation in universal creation. She concludes that ‘as a result of this new
sensibility to what is and what is not (yet possible) …you further an
understanding of who you are…I’ve come to a deeper understanding of who I am
through doing the quilts and walking the Wheel of the Year, perhaps more than
any other time of my life. I’m so comfortable with who I am.’

I have come to terms with who I am on a soul level, to the core of my being…and
all of the processes, the ritual festivals, … have had a wonderful impact on my
thought processes, and I am left with a sense of wonder… where did that
creative energy come from? And I look at my pieces and think, gee, I did that!

Jennifer’s feeling comfortable with her woman-ness, both physical and spiritual
(and other women who expressed the same sense differently), is a phenomenon
within the spiritual feminist movement that no longer reduces women to ‘the mere
nexus of natural energies; the mere object of irresistible natural forces. The
spiritual feminist account of female sacrality, especially in its biological
manifestations, does indeed make women a conduit of divine creativity’ (Raphael
1996, p. 76). In recognising the claim as ‘irreducibly religious’ and sacralizing, it
does not empty woman of will or personhood. In fact, a woman’s embodiment
understood as a manifestation of Goddess offers a different understanding of that
embodiment than if that divinity were imaged as male. In spite of this experience
being mediated in the usual ways, by ‘language and concept’, Raphael points out
that the process does indeed serve to overstep ‘the imaginal and epistemological
estrangements of religious experience’ as situated exclusively within a

\(^{38}\) Jennifer provided a written response of 2 pages to the questionnaire, as well as a full interview
on tape.
And in the context of creativity, there is another dimension to Goddess: that of engaging the construction of identity through a process that results conceptually and psychically from the experience of working physically outside or parallel to a masculinist perception of creativity. In this process, Goddess ‘signifies… the inherent spiritual capacity in every individual, which harmoniously expresses itself together with the totality of the intellectual, emotional and physical capacities of the person’ (Gottner-Abendroth, 1991, p. 217; my emphasis). This experience of goddess engenders our individual freedom by allowing us to form our own personal experience of deity. The process is at once personalising and unifying, such that Jennifer clearly recognises the spiritual aspect of her creative process, to the extent that she returned to university and wrote a thesis on her spiritual development through ritual. ‘(T)his has been a major turning point in my life, because it has opened up a whole new vista, and the big breakthrough is that I am a creative person. I am a multifaceted woman, which creating through the Wheel of the Year has given me an understanding of… and I’ve made a very deep soul connection with myself as woman.’ Jennifer carefully made a distinction between her developing sense of being a creative person and her relationship to her spirituality. She described the way she felt that her creativity ‘had been nurtured by coming to the workshops’, which were ‘a catalyst for the seed … already embedded there… and it blossomed and evolved.’ But she describes the process of learning about Goddess spirituality as a different dynamic: ‘… on the spiritual level I feel the seed had not been there, and that there was a planting of the seed in the workshops.’
Chapter 4

THE RE-FABRICATING EXHIBITIONS

Figure 23: Ward, Dunn, Runagall & Blefari. ‘It’s just what we do’
(re-fabricating our lives, 2001)

Without images how would I know what you see?
(David Hockney, 1999, p. 43)
From my point of view as curator of these exhibitions our textile fabrications not only create the stories we live by, stories which may have originated some time in the past, but also re-tell them as we take up the issues of our lives and times in order to re-form a future visionary for ourselves, our family and our planet. The unique and personal stories and images told through fabric and thread have given testimony to the wonderful variety of contemporary textile expression which comes from the threads which interweave (often in all manner of unexpected designs) to make our lives: threads issuing from concepts of self, family, country, origins, beliefs.

Through our creative works we are continuing and maintaining textile and cultural traditions whilst offering new perspectives for ourselves and those who come to see the works, through which the visionary function of our art expressions operate. The position we take as artists/creators of our own stories and the larger story is as evident as the art we create. The evidence of both affirming a textile heritage from the stance of our art as women, as well as for alternative ways to express and make meaningful this stance, has been profoundly visible in the works exhibited in all three previous exhibitions.

(Solomon, Ozquilt Network Newsletter no.42, Dec 2001)

During the period of the research I was the curator of four exhibitions of women’s contemporary textile creations at a public community gallery in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales. The exhibitions served several purposes. They provided the needed opportunity for women nationwide practising textile art to exhibit their work, and have encouraged general public recognition of the creative use of textiles. The exhibitions took the research topic into the broader context of the collective imaginary within the creative process, firstly by eliciting responses to set curatorial themes from the artists themselves, and then in seeking responses from the viewing public, which are of equal focus in this chapter. It describes how the exhibitions evolved in relation to the focal points of the inquiry, how artists perceived the themes of the exhibitions, and what was revealed to others who viewed their art works.
The *re-fabricating* banner and curatorial theses

The banner title of the four exhibitions was decided upon after giving due consideration to the various inflections associated with the verb ‘to fabricate’, most obviously for its association with fabric, material, the raw stuff from which patches are cut and stitched into quilts. The prefix ‘pre’ was found to add the nuance of making something before setting it in its final place by making standardised parts for rapid assembly. This is a process that could be compared to quilt making, where fabric is cut into measured pieces for the quick assembly of blocks, variations of which are then pieced to form the final pattern for a quilt. At the time it seemed to me, however, that the addition of the conventional prefix ‘pre’ to the verb deprived it of a sense of the *process* of fabrication as an *act* of creativity.

Of the other more generally applicable inflections of meaning of the word ‘to fabricate’, the Macquarie dictionary (990 ed) includes ‘to make by art and labour, to devise or invent, to fake or forge’. Each of these could be comfortably accommodated to the making of textile fabrications, both for personal use and for exhibitions. Quilts are an artful form made skillfully through (mostly) women’s labour, motivated by love and caring and, until recently rarely sold commercially. They are often the result of being inventive, for either practical or artistic purpose. And they may be devised to ‘fake’ a blanket by the use of worn clothing being cut up and reprocessed.\(^{39}\) All of these inflections infer a sense of participation in creative processes.

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\(^{39}\) In the Australian countryside hessian bags or squares of fabric samples gleaned from travelling salesmen were often used to make a form called waggas in some parts of the country, waddies further north. Instead of the contemporary use of wool or polyester for the wadding between the layers, worn out clothing was often stitched in between the layers to give warmth and substance to the blanket quilt. Research done for the National Quilt Register website (2001) has revealed that frequently men working in remoter parts were responsible for the construction of some of these rugs.
A difficulty was perceived in using the conventional prefix of *pre*. The prefix *re-* deriving from the Latin term meaning ‘again’ has long been used in feminist writings to establish a sense of re-creating, bringing into form by re-claiming and re-visioning, through the process of re-visiting. It provides and opportunity for ‘re-enchanting’, implying the actions of singing the song again, and of ‘looking again’. The invitation to take a second look, using the visual medium of textile art, at the stories that have formed our perceptions of self-identity, relationship to other and a place in the universal story is the condition of interaction in the collective imagination which allows us to ‘re-form’ those stories. In order to elicit the sense of re-forming as intrinsic to and in-forming the creative process, the sense that all that is remains involved in an incessant process of creating and being created, the title remained in lower case with hyphen intact. As such, the key word for the exhibition themes seemed to indicate a cyclic process of creativity, serving to draw attention to that process which rolls the wheel forward and backwards in a never-ending spiral of creative genesis and demise, (a process which characterises much of women’s labours in the process of nurturing and raising children.) My notes on the matter often made reference to the intention to ‘re-fabricate what is generally perceived as simply functional and merely profane craft’ into ‘revelatory and sacralizing art’.

**The curatorial theses**

The term ‘re-fabricating’, as applied to both the process of creativity and the curation of the exhibitions, grew in significance for me as I considered its relevance to the inquiry as a whole. Through the act of creating, in the context of the sacred Wheel of the Year, the act of creation is an ever present, always happening event, in which all are participants, be it consciously or otherwise. As I became more conscious each year of the process of constructing the *re-fabricating* exhibitions for the research project, I realised that I was creating the themes for the exhibitions in a way that corresponded to the creative process as

Mary Daly reviews the use of the prefix ‘re’ from the feminist position of needing to reconstitute fuller meaning to words influenced by a history of patriarchal and phallocentric use. One such word is ‘research’, which implies the need to search again for what is ‘screamingly obvious…yet systematically hidden by former researchers….then paraded as scientifically proven.’
described by the Wheel of the Year (as described in Chapter 3). Remembering that when the creative cycle on the Wheel is envisaged as metaphor or archetype, the seasonal changes can be experienced internally and manifest at any time of the year. As the spark of inspiration reached its fulfilment in the manifestation of the current exhibition (corresponding to completion at Beltane and Litha), it developed into the seed of an idea (corresponding to the seasons of Lammas and Mabon), which was then put into the dark soil, residing in the liminal space between the worlds until it showed signs of germination (Samhain). As the idea for the next exhibition’s theme became clear, it was born and named (in Yule and Imbolc), and took on vigour and vitality as the exhibition started to take shape with the arrival of submissions (corresponding to Easter) ready for public display. The cycle began again with the completion of each exhibition, as the creative process reached its peak in manifesting the diverse uniqueness of each woman’s art expression as metaform of the metaphor for the creative process.

From the position of creativity on the Wheel of the Year, the timing of the exhibitions coincided with that part of the seasonal cycle of new beginnings, echoing our connection to Earth’s creative and transforming cycle. I was aware of this symbolic significance that the exhibitions were being held when we celebrate the season of re-birth of the Sun’s life-giving energies, and the return of the light at the Winter Solstice (Yule), the stillpoint of the year when there is a re-turn to the light and birthing of the new, when metaphorically ‘the Child of Promise awakens within us, reminding us that we can be more than we are’ (Starhawk 1989, p.219). The significance was more than a ‘symbolic’ in the conventional use of the word to indicate something not actually happening. It was an embodied experienced, embedded in nature’s cyclic round to coincide with other seasonal celebrations happening in the Blue Mountains at this time, especially the Winter Magic Festival which has a pagan focus. Several of the official openings were held on the Saturday closest to the day of Winter Solstice.
Each curatorial theme evolved during the course of the inquiry, intending to provide the backdrop and give the impetus to re-imagining and re-inventing understandings about a spirituality that sees creativity as a sacred process for women as artists, shape-shifters and transformers of perceived realities. It could be said that they were the enabling receptacles from which the art form could be born. The particular theme for each year’s exhibition was conceived from sensibilities inhering in the creative process on each turn of the Wheel - memory of the past (1999), care for the future (2000), and making response to the present (2001), all of which give expression to a sense of self and a spiritual identity, which was the theme that gave life to the fourth exhibition in 2002. Though presented sequentially in time and space, the themes can be seen as strands of threads. The strands are colourful embroidery threads, which interweave through each theme, overlapping and interconnecting to make patterns in different formations. To use another analogy, like a butterfly or cicada, the development of the curatorial theses went through various stages of metamorphosis over time, the changes often hidden under the ground or encased in darkness, to emerge in their final form (at least for the research project) with re-fabricating our indigenous spirit in 2002. And as with the metamorphosis of the butterfly, for which each stage is contained in the other and is intrinsic to and essential for its growth and formation, the series of exhibitions formed a holistic expression for a collective imagining, a new rhythm for creativity as sacred, and the formation of an unfolding imaginary for a sense of self in place. Though unaware at the time, journal notes recording my inspiration for the 1999 exhibition show incipient evidence of future themes:

We are women reclaiming the word, re-storying our memories by revisiting the ancient web site of myths and symbols, which are the basis of our cultural heritage. In doing so, many of us are seeking to find ourselves in the goddess as healer, to express our memories as the fabric of our lives relived through our craft and our art. We are recovering roots of a past long buried in order to create new memories for the future. These memories live in our cells and are carried in the creative expression of our bodies. (Journal notes)
In deciding on the themes, I was aware of not wanting to impose my ideas through the texts, though the entry forms did provide some conceptual guidelines for each exhibition. Creating themes for an exhibition of visual artwork is a contentious issue, as it can be seen to be providing a textual ‘explanation’ of and framework for the works created. The themes were presented to the artists with the intention of encouraging a conceptual approach to their work that might facilitate a personal interaction with the ideas being explored in the research project. As they unfolded organically into consciousness, the titles for the exhibitions developed in the following sequence:

- *re-fabricating our memories* (1999)
- *re-fabricating the future* (2000)
- *re-fabricating our lives* (2001)
- *re-fabricating our indigenous spirit* (2002)

Over the four years of the exhibitions, the textile works of 47 women were exhibited. Some of the women had art works in each of the years, others for several of the years, while some submitted for only one exhibition. Some of the women submitted two pieces of work for an exhibition, allowable by the entry conditions. The first of the exhibitions as listed above, *re-fabricating our memories*, was an invitational exhibition offered to 12 artists in the local area of the Blue Mountains, comprising 31 items that included 3-dimensional installation pieces, wearable art, sculptural forms in textiles, and works in the art quilt genre. The quilt as a legitimate art form, generally defined as two or more layers of fabric stitched together, is a relatively new idea in the Australian context, and 1999 *re-fabricating* exhibition built on an exhibition of the previous year curated by fellow quilt artist, Sue Wademan and myself to show the work of textile artists from the local region of the Blue Mountains, particularly art quilts. Though some

41 The words in the titles were deliberately left in lower case, and the use of the word ‘our’ in the titles was aimed at the broad community who are involved in the art of quilt making, particularly to be inclusive of all stages of the involvement, and to give a sense of both the personal and cultural aspects of the art. It was to be expected that the participants would be mainly from a Western European background, though no limitations based on gender or ethnicity were set in place.
of the artists were working in the art quilt form, different textile applications were included in the 1999 exhibition, as indeed in the exhibitions that followed. The following year the call for entries was extended to textile artists from Australia and New Zealand. Twenty artists submitted 26 pieces, again in a wide range of textile applications. In 2001, with further publicity for soliciting submissions, 35 pieces of works from 29 artists, including 12 from other states in Australia and one from New Zealand went on exhibition. In 2002, the gallery again reached its capacity with 37 pieces from 30 individual artists being presented. Over the four exhibitions a total of 129 exhibits were shown.

My role

As with the *Soul Seasons* workshops, my public role was that of a facilitator for promoting the exhibitions and putting in place the logistics required for this purpose. This included the production of invitation cards and catalogues, and providing the various magazines and newspapers with promotional material both in seeking submissions, and in advising the public the exhibition was on. Invitations to the exhibitions were sent to each of the exhibitors to distribute, posted to the gallery’s mailing list and other interested parties, such as quilting associations and school art and design departments, and the exhibitions were advertised in local newspapers.

Another curatorial role was to arrange the official opening day for each exhibition, in itself a type of ritual that required thoughtful reflection in preparation. The intention was to open understanding of each theme, to create relevance for it in those who attended and provide inspiration for transformative experiences through claiming the exhibitions space as a space for realizing deeply embodied ways of [g]owing. Though it might be expected that the guest speaker might have had strong connections with the world of patchwork quilting, for the first exhibition, *re-fabricating our memories*, it seemed appropriate to ask an elder from our local community who had completed her PhD in the area of women’s studies. In her opening talk, Dr O’Beirne chose her words carefully in describing
the artworks on exhibition as ‘a recollection and re-materialisation of our personal histories,’ and affirming the importance of

    each woman telling her own story with her perception of what happened, how it happened, and its effect upon her. It is the effect of the memory that is involved in the re-fabrication of identity, just as re-working fragmented fabric pieces creates a new artwork... which is, whether consciously or not, a subversive act for the production of meaning.

The 2000 exhibition was opened by Margaret Wright, quilter, quilt collector and author, and at the time convener for the Paralympics 2000 Project where half a million dollars was raised through the sale of quilts to support the athletes. In 2001, Karen Fail, author, editor and consultant to the quilting industry, opened re-fabricating our lives. A special ritual event was held to open the 2002 exhibition of re-fabricating indigenous spirit. I invited two women to jointly create ritual for the opening. I had had connections with both over many years as we explored our creative and spiritual lives. I saw their stories as both personal and complementary in their quest for exploring their own origins. I felt that there would be others at the opening that would find some resonance with the traditional smoking ceremony performed by Cheryl Moodai Robinson, a descendant of the Stolen Generations and from the Koamu peoples of southwest Queensland, and/or the telling of Annie’s journey through the path of eco-spirituality and Goddess.

Cheryl, one of the artists in the exhibition had agreed to create ritual space together with Annie Byron, a performance artist and writer. Lighting a fire from local callistemon branches and reclaiming her Indigenous connection to her lands and ancestors, Cheryl initiated the ritual by acknowledging the ancestors and traditional custodians of the area, seeking a cleansing and acceptance of the exhibition from them. Those present were also invited to take a callistemon branch, throw it on the fire and speak of connections to what they may know of their origins. Annie spoke of her experience of uncovering a spiritual heritage long lost to her as woman, and invited all present to acknowledge their place on Earth by invoking the energies of the four directions by turning towards the north,
west, south and east where we stood. As a shared sense of the sacred that
crossed boundaries in non-threatening, oppositional ways, the opening ceremony
was an embodied experience, and transformative for many present, women and
men, by giving voice to, healing and empowering many experiences that were
shared and heard by the community present, which, like the ripples on a pond
had the potential to affect the lives of others.

It became clear over the years that there was another aspect to the performance
of the role of coordinator/curator, not only the logistical processes associated
with providing the physical opportunities to textile artists to exhibit (of which there
are few) but also by extending an inspirational space for the artists to step into to
explore and express their worldviews, in a personal way and for public witness.
At the 2002 exhibition, *re-fabricating our indigenous spirit*, I had the chance to
talk to some of the contributing artists. Artist Lyn Ward spoke of my role as
curator as one does of a ritual ‘holding the space’, and the exhibitions as a
collection of women’s worlds that are ‘discussions done visually.’ For Lyn, it is
important to be ‘immersed in themes’ and to have a sense of achievement
through ‘putting my art work out into public space.’ These comments express the
way I saw the exhibitions: as providing a context for re-contextualising
worldviews and viewpoints, subjectively and inter-subjectively.

**Inviting submissions and selection**

The procedure in inviting submissions for the exhibitions following *re-fabricating
our memories*, has been to include the exhibitions in the forthcoming calendar of
events published in national quilting magazines and newsletters, such as the
*Template*, the quarterly magazine of the Quilters’ Guild of NSW Inc, and other
commercial magazines for quilters and textile artists, such as the *Down Under
Quilts* and *Textile Fibre Forum*. Another method was to include entry forms with
the distribution of the *Ozquilt Network Newsletter*, which is received by over 200
members throughout Australia and New Zealand. The text of the entry forms for
the submission of art works needed to be brief, to the point, and inspirational.
The aim was to present ideas for conceptual understandings in order to elicit visual imagery. A summary in sequence of the entry forms that artists received, including the inspirational quotations follows.

• **re-fabricating our memories (1999)**

The first exhibition invited women to visually represent the experience of relating to memory. Initial notes record my inspiration for the current and show evidence of incipient future themes, though at the time I was not fully aware of how they would unfold:

> We are women reclaiming the word - re-storying our memories by re-visiting the ancient web sites of myths and symbols that are the basis of our cultural heritage. In doing so, many of us are seeking to find ourselves in the goddess as healer; to express the memories revived through our craft and our art, which is the true fabric of our lives. We are recovering memories of roots of a past long buried in order to create new memories for the future. These memories live in our cells and are carried in the creative expression of our bodies.

In its final form, the text of the entry form as curatorial thesis can be seen to allude to the exhibition themes of the following years. It suggests that as ‘a patchwork of memories…we are our past, and the future belongs to those who remember’; that ‘memories offer the opportunity to re-route the journeys by which we find ourselves and our place in the world.’

• **re-fabricating the future (2000)**

Concepts of the processes of time and space being beyond our usual lineal perception, which has abstracted and separated each as distinct, independent dimensions of experience, form the basis of a series of questions devised to inspire contributions towards creating the future, by weaving unseen forces into form. ‘What re-birth might our creative works seek to call forth? What values presented through the diversity of our art might become part of a larger patchwork of templates for future creations?’ There is again an invitation to ‘re-story – or re-fabricate the questions of life, both personal and cultural, by our imaginative reflections.’ The past is also present: ‘In a Universe being born from the beginning of time, what deep memories might provide the fabric for creating
the future? Added to which is the challenge that ‘that which grips our imagination will determine our futures...the future is in our hands!’

- **re-fabricating our lives (2001)**

The third exhibition in the series, *re-fabricating our lives*, grounds the creative experience of melding past memories and future dreams into the way we are making meaning in the context of our lives currently* (promotional material). The theme of being actively involved in the larger creation story is developed in this exhibition. It is a call to consciousness that, we are ‘co-creators of the world we live in, patching both past and future into our creative pursuits, piecing together a story that reveals our capacities for self-creation’. It suggests that the art we make ‘can release us from the ‘already’, familiar containments of life into…the possibility of transformation brought about by our innate capacity to create.’ It positions the artist as purveyor of possibility, facing the crossroads and contributing to the evolutionary creation story through our art. Engaging in a worldwide theme for the year of the millennium, the questions to the artists point directly to a personal role in the creation story: ‘What stories will our textile arts contribute to the overall creation story of the 21st century? Does our purpose in producing art …show the changes we wish to see in the world?’

- **re-fabricating (our) indigenous spirit (2002)**

The fourth exhibition in the series sought to bring together the themes of the previous three exhibitions through the recognition of our ground of being: inter-relatedness, with self, each other and the environment, by positing an open question: ‘How are you re-fabricating a sense of your indigenous spirit…what are the signifiers of this process?’ The suggestions for consideration include the understanding of and sensibility for cultural story and symbol, the significance of the feminine principle in our heritage, living in synchronicity with natural cycles, finding commonality in difference, and ‘respecting the way of mutual reciprocity’. The underlying premise is that as custodians of traditions associated with self in relation to place, these traditions nevertheless ‘do not remain static’; that ‘as creators of the cultural story’ we are presented with an opportunity ‘to un-cover
qualities and attributes, stories and symbols inherent to our own indigenous spirit as women re-forming cultural myths and signs for a 21\textsuperscript{st} century Australian story.'

In all of the invitational publications, the role of the artists as not only recorder but creator of culture was a central concept for all the exhibitions, but particularly reiterated strongly in the Ozquilt Network Newsletter (March 2002). It was intended to encourage the artists to consider shifting and broadening the horizons that hold the term ‘indigenous’ on some remote plane nearing the vanishing point. I referred to the role of the artist as ‘pertaining to the shamanic by providing interpretation and guidance and having the capacity to work magic by changing perception.’

Just as a shaman works with visions, visual art is a modality for expanding our sense(s) of communion and communication with other worlds – nature, non-human beings and matter, the spirit world. This year’s re-fabricating invites consideration of the question: how can we authentically visualize indigenous spirit? Responses may be found anywhere along the spectrum, from the deeply personal to the broadly cultural, giving visibility to archaic whispers from the ancestors and a desire for the way of the heart – invisible imaginings, often dismissed by the rational mindset.

The following statement for an article about the 2001 exhibition summarized the overall inspiration for the \textit{re-fabricating} exhibitions (published in \textit{Down Under Quilts}, October 2001 pp68-71).

Since earliest times, art has been a bridge between the worlds of reality and dreaming. Someone once said that artists create dreams for those who are awake. The intention of my own art practice in textiles and involvement with women’s textile art is to create bridges which link the seemingly profound gap between the so-called intellectual and therefore ‘expert’ ways of knowing about life, and the wisdom available to us through the everyday experiential perception of life and its processes.

Unlike many exhibitions in the contemporary textile arts, the selection of works to be included in the \textit{re-fabricating} exhibitions was not juried. Though a size limit (2 metres maximum for any one side) was set by considerations of available gallery space, all works submitted were accepted. Whilst it was the intention that the exhibitions make significant contribution to giving public display to the best of contemporary art quilt making, the brief to exhibit contemporary textile art gave
opportunity for artists working in 3 dimensions to be included, as well as allowing for the many styles, experiments and levels of skill which are part of the collective response to an evolving creative genre. The criteria often applied by curators to the selection of art works for exhibition – criteria such as an overall homogeneity of the works, strict adherence to theme, excellence of design and technique, were not given priorities. Nevertheless curatorial decisions regarding the positioning and hanging of the works in the gallery were made by myself bearing in mind such factors as expressions of themes, design, technical compatibilities and contrasts as they related to colour and size, and other factors that contribute to an overall satisfying and provocative display.

**Artists’ Creation Stories**

Following convention, each exhibition was presented with an accompanying catalogue of artists and the written text explaining their works. The convention is to list the names of the artists in alphabetical order, the materials and techniques used in the construction of each work, and the sale price. Also following convention, the artists were asked to write a brief statement about their motivational source, and to indicate how they saw their work relating to the curatorial theme. These statements were included in the catalogues held for use in the gallery for the exhibitions. Having a detailed catalogue provided the viewer with the opportunity to either view the works prior to reading the text, or to hold the two processes together, interactively viewing the visuals and reading the text. Often people preferred to form their own impressions by first looking at the artworks, then take another round of the gallery with the catalogued creation stories to refer to. Many visitors commented on the value of including the artists’ statements in the catalogue, as it helped explain and expand their immediate intellectual and visceral responses to the works. Taken together, the art works and the written texts form an oral/aural tradition, providing a different space for the viewer to find another form of hearing/listening. I consider these statements together with the artworks as the artists’ Creation Stories, and in the first section

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42 I found it interesting to note that the word ‘text’ is derived from the Teutonic word *textura* and meant ‘tapestry’ (Schlain 1991, p. 43).
of this chapter give my responses to the exhibitions as though by way of a curator’s editorial. In doing this, I draw on my personal impressions, notations in journals, my commentaries made during and after the exhibitions through reviews and magazine articles. The responses to the four exhibitions in conversation and interview with visitors will be considered later in this chapter. Together these responses invite the formation of a composite view of the interrelationship between the image and how it is received as metaphor.

**In the beginning was the image**

In this first section of the discussion that follows, I will be considering the relationship between artists and their creations as described by their personal perceptions and interpretations of the four curatorial theses through their visual forms and their written creation stories. The images and statements provided by the artists are their ‘myths’, their creation stories, and as such, resist being received from the standpoint of a static or empirical reality. Their creation myths offer a contextualized response in time and space creating the life-blood of the inquiry, giving it embodied form. They are narratives of personal creative experience conceptualized and shape-shifted into the metaform of visual artworks, and together with the reflexivity of their written texts, provide a space for visibility through the lens that is the greater metalogic made visible through the grid of myth (see Krauss 1979). Together they are epistemological signifiers, and provide the space for further insights towards the possibility of changing perceptions, and for a critical examination in the process of the identification of our subjectivity (as self and woman) and self-other inter-subjectivity. The degree to which myth and visual story forms and informs the process of creating paradigms for worldviews is being considered in this inquiry. Their voices are diverse and personal, sometimes brief, at other times quite detailed. In viewing the artworks and reading the creation stories the acknowledgement of subjective and inter-subjective interdependence negates any notion of subjective existence as distinct from representations of existence, uniting experience with
representation, denying the ‘patriarchal fictional aesthetic’ identified by Heidi Gottner-Abendroth (1991).

**Uncovering themes emerging**

The following section derives from a combination of sources. It presents my reflections on the four exhibitions in relation to the artists’ interpretations of the themes through excerpts from the artists’ statements developed in relation to the visual works, both of which are used to flesh out the themes identified. Other sources are conversations with the artists (private and public), my analysis of the exhibitions written for publication in various textile journals and magazines, and records of personal observations made in journals. It is proposed that the artists be given space to ‘voice’ their views here, through my personal identification of emergent themes appearing in the creation stories. Far from ‘completing the picture’ or being treated as evidence to support an existing (or non-existent) worldview, the themes emerged in combination with the images through my process of engaging with the dynamics of interpretation, which enabled the image to be viewed from different frameworks (or perspectives). I am aware that in the act of viewing and interpreting I am offering a distinct and personal viewpoint to the texts that cannot claim to be unmediated – I came to consider my process to be engaging in a phenomenology from a feminist standpoint. And while I do not intend to imply that the artwork is a ‘product’ of the creative imagination, since it remains constantly in the domain of the creative, yet it is vital to this inquiry to consider the creative process engaged in by the artists – their metaphor and metaform in considering the meta[ph]ormic process for artists and later, for viewers of the exhibitions.

Rather than considering the four annual exhibitions in strict chronological sequence (though this is generally the case), the thematic categories that emerged are considered in relation to the four exhibitions overall, and reference made to the specific exhibition(s) in which the artist’s work may be seen by
indicating the sequential number of the exhibition (#1,2,3,4,). Since many of the responses to themes identified here have the propensity to overlap and merge, the examples provided by my selection of works for analysis are necessarily artificially segregated into categories, and remain open to interpretation. As scraps are assembled to make a quilt, the material offered below may be seen as one whole picture, presenting an inclusive and interconnected set of patches for what may be sensed as a phenomenology of experience. In her opening address at the 2002 exhibition, Annie Byron aptly described the complexity of this phenomenon, speaking of

...the number of different entry points the artists have found to the theme of indigenous spirit... to delight the senses and thrill the intellect. There’s politics if you look – challenges to our lack of respect of nature, and songs of appreciation of nature. There’s consciousness that ancestor spirit has governed this land for millennia, and that we also are custodians. There is depth of feeling: as one of the artists says: art helps make spirit visible.

In the process of accepting/analysing the gifts offered by the artists, I found many ways to piece together the emergent voices of the quilts and their stories; in fact they seemed to be having a conversation. From a perspective that was listening for the voices, and looking for visibility that could give shape to a spiritual feminist creative imaginary deriving from self, the points below stood out from what I heard and what I saw across the four exhibitions:

- Ancestral connections: memory in time and space
- Place as source: sensing (be-)longing
- Women uncovering Self as source
- Self as Other in inclusive and reciprocal relationships
- Change in constancy: life cycles transforming Self and Other
- Making the invisible visible: embodied creating

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43 The exhibitions in the Appendices are represented in the text as:

#1 re-fabricating our memories (1999)
#2 re-fabricating the future (2000)
#3 re-fabricating our lives (2001)
#4 re-fabricating our indigenous spirit (2002)
#5 The Wheel Turns (Solomon 1999 – 2003) - see Chapter 5
The very act of exhibiting your artwork requires a stepping away from anonymity, the recognition of belonging to tribe, a collective, in as many variations as one cares to become identified or intimate with. It is a highly revealing act, and as such a courageous act for change. I have sought permission from the artists to use their names as they are, of course, used in the exhibition catalogues. It is recommended that the reader first 'visit' the exhibitions in the Appendices in order to reflect on the works themselves before reading the Creation Stories or my impressions that follow here.

**Ancestral connections: memory, time and space**

The categories that emerged from the synthesis of the visual and textual material that represent the artists’ creation stories, drew on each of the themes of each of the exhibitions forming a multi-layered approach. At a public soiree held at the gallery during *re-fabricating our memories* many of the exhibiting artists talked about their visual interpretations of the theme and the processes they went through. In a review article, this is how I wrote of the occasion:

> They spoke of how their work reflects the more recent and personal occurrences in their lives, as well as proffering images for the possibility of taking us back into perhaps more ancient ways of viewing the world, through which we might experience a sense of collective memory. The unique response of each artist’s work to the theme showed the way memory forms layers, and the way each layer builds upon the other, remaining mysteriously constant whilst at the same time having the potential to transform the perception of both the creator and the viewer as the layers become transparent. Each artist spoke of an awakening during the creative process to earlier memories within her psyche, the creation giving tangible evidence of layers which uplift and celebrate the resilience and creativity of the human spirit by providing visible access to truths - felt as visceral, instinctual and real, recognisable beyond time and space.

(Ozquilt Network Newsletter 2000, no.35)

The article includes further commentary on individual works describing a perception of the way memory informs a sense of self: ‘early memories of childhood, the meanings of which revealed themselves... more fully over time, as much as by the revelations gained during the time of their creation as by evoking
feelings of a displacement of our linear concept of the chronology of time.’ And the conflation of time and memory was referred to in considering some of the works:

Penny Seta’s use of original screen-printed Tiwi fabric designs handed down through countless generations (was used) to render the age-old simplicity of the kimono form, showed at the same time constancy and variability in form, which is what she has called the ‘canvas of the kimono’.

In her story, Helen Toner (#1) refers to school memories of the ‘dull monotony’ of cross-stitching that nevertheless ‘kept me connected’, then and now; through the enthusiasm felt in the continuous repetition of stitches ‘like as mantra. I stitch therefore I am… Only stitching matters.’ In another conflation of past and present, Jo Steele (#1) uses the surprise combination of stitching thread into wire mesh as her canvas, recalling both past childhood memories and an emerging spiritual journey as she stitches into it. The process, the sense of lost time yet to be discovered, like the wire base, is ‘both invisible and tangible - seemingly contradictory, yet somehow harmonious.’ The transparency of the works provides the space for childhood memories of ‘excitement and joy’, and are now totems of ‘a clan, tribe or family at once visible and invisible.’

The sense of memories arising occurred as both deeply personal and again is found in the works in all four exhibitions. Dianne Firth (#2) visually depicts through her work ‘the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel’, showing a sense of the future as the present, both of which are a continuum of the past. The image may also be seen to connect other personal circumstances as they evolved over 3 exhibitions. In creating her work for re-fabricating our indigenous spirit, artist Val Nadin (#4) spoke of discovering memories about wartime Britain, a particular patch of childhood, which was held in common with her husband thus ‘drawing them closer.’ At the ritual opening of the exhibition, as people stepped forward to add callistemon branches to the purifying fire, Val’s husband spoke of the ‘cross fertilisation’ of memories of childhood brought about in the making of the quilt.
Another artist mentioned her concern at revealing through her creation story memories that might give offence to her parents, but it strengthened her sense of ‘having arrived’ at her own personal space (Lyn Kabanoff: #4). While displaying a sense of bereavement, her husband told those assembled at the opening that, owing to wars in Europe, he did not know of his ancestry. Another artist realizing the links to her ancestral background was Sue Dennis (#4), whose work included the rubbings of a heavily embroidered tablecloth stitched for her wedding, surrounded by the traditional woven braids worn by the women of her ancestral European homeland.

An extraordinary sense of conflation of time and space is elicited by Yvonne Chapman’s (#1) three-dimensional fabric sculpture titled Vessel of Dreams and Memories, which uses a variety of techniques to express ‘each memory [that] had its own character and texture.’ The memories are visually available, having been elicited on a visit to her family home in Holland, thereby ‘reconnecting with ancestral grounds.’ She describes experiencing the scene and the process of rekindling old friendships as ‘surreal… where time stopped, (and) we filled the years with laugh and tears’, sensing herself beyond time as the re-gathered memories overflowed from her past into her present. This is how she described the process of memory, connecting with ancestors as she collaged, painted, fused and overlapped the fabrics, feather, beads and threads:

Over the past years I had flown back to Holland to visit my mother who had become ill. Wandering through my childhood home alone, still overflowing with furniture, rugs and so many memorable things, brought back many memories. I would hear voices, singing and music. Familiar scents came wafting to my nose. Floorboards creaked at the same spots, and they made me smile! The attic was still full of mystery. In the garden stood the old apple tree, still faithfully bearing fruit. Further back, hidden under heavy branches was the cubby house, now full of stuff. The swing was hanging by a thread, the chook house was still visible, and there were fragments of our vegie patch.

The vessel is not empty. On the inside it is treated with the application of memory, symbolically visible, through the application of fabrics and assorted
techniques, creating a sack, generous and embracing as though capable of holding all time, all childhood memories and dreams.

**Re-sourcing (be-)longing in place**

Understanding and exploring landscapes as a source of personal identification through origins, ancestral connections, recent family history and a living and evolving sense of place has been an ever-present response from the artists, linking closely with memories. Like windows that open to reveal horizons that move towards us as we move towards them, crossing unknown boundaries, advancing and receding through time and space, memories provide insights to expand the limits imposed on sense of self and place (Abram 1997). Memories can be collected and set within a different landscape, storying a re-birth, a reconciliation that can be personal or on the cultural level, collapsing binary/monocular vision into a complex and interactive experience of totality, universality through the act of creation, and experience passed on through the object created, (as evident through responses from some of the viewers).

The Australian nation as it is known today has been established through migration, and over several of the exhibitions, the theme of physical displacement from homelands re-occurred. As a migrant from Austria, Christa Sanders mentioned in conversation at the 2002 *indigenous spirit* exhibition that she is concerned about comments that her work is ‘not Australian enough’. Separation from ancestors and land has strongly influenced her art. ‘Being a migrant I thought my indigenous spirit lost forever.’ It was in depicting this sense of displacement through creating landscapes from her local environs that she had a ‘powerful realisation’: ‘…it was in the belonging I could reclaim my indigenous spirit.’ She relates to her sense of self through her creative work and Australia as her new home. As a visitor to the exhibition, she talked to me of the ‘deep well of darkness’ visible in my *Coincidence of Opposites*, that which urges the creative spirit, which in her works is depicted as a small red hill in all her quilts), representing the place of the ‘unknown self’ that she is still in process of
uncovering. In describing one of the quilts in her series, Sanders (#4) identifies
nine criteria in the process of working towards the sense of a ‘very personal
belonging’. They indicate willingness to make choices, face the past, respecting
difference. They are available to read in her creation story in the Appendices.

Jennifer Rolfe (#4) records a longing and responsibility that is the need for
integration in her framed textile work by the same name. Acknowledging ‘the land
and all of its creatures’, her work is a statement of belonging, recognizing the
possibility of and claiming responsibility for a sense of belonging that emanates
both from ancestral heritage and her place of birth. Creating felt fabric in colours
to reflect the landscape of Australia and Wales, ‘the landscape colours merge,
sometimes blending, sometimes discordant,’ thereby reflecting her sense of
multiple origins that inform her ‘transplanted’ identity.

Both of the artists mentioned above indicate that reclaiming self-in-place is a
deep and personal process. In another reference to the process of integrating
self and place through the experience of immigration, the work of Diana Vincent
(#4) aims to make visible her arrival in that place where ‘the earth beneath my
feet is my place, (and) Australia is now my motherland.’ She remembers the
experience of ‘having no sense of place or belonging, ‘ her awareness
heightened by the fact of being a woman with a family, whose responsibility is ‘to
establish that place where once more everyone feels they belong.’ Gillian Hand’s
(#3) work is also about migration – both physical and of the soul. In another
personal statement that expands into wider horizons, Interiors is about transition
– through ‘… Subjectivity, Communion and Differentiation’ (in reference to Brian
Swimme’s work) from the point of view of a migrant. Using a collection of
treasured memorabilia embedded into an elongated formation of background of
felt, she questions the possibility of ‘balancing’ these aspects of the process of
self-in-Creation – especially for an immigrant, ‘… a person (who) does not live in
their original ‘biom’’.

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Jan Clark expresses a growing relationship with the place where she lives, depicting in her hand-dyed and machine appliquéd quilt *Hillside (orange)* (#4) the perennial bushfires that ‘are part of the natural cycle of my environment… integral to my connection with the land.’ For myself personally, living also in such an environment, the work was transfixing. I was mesmerized by the vision of an expanse of the landscape as a bushfire rages out of control, evoking the ‘conflicting emotions – respect for the beauty and power of the fire, its cleansing, all-embracing potential; and the fear, dread and pain’ as they were described by a visitor to the exhibition. In another exhibition Jan’s two contributions (#3), thread drawings that show ‘the intricate detail of the very small within the landscape, are testimonies to a sense of deep embeddedness in nature that supports her understanding of belonging to a particular part of Earth: ‘By working through the series…’ (in response to rediscovering her environment after 2 years absence spent in northwest America), ‘I really felt that I had come home.’

Connection to land and place can be disrupted, re-invented, connect the Jurassic period with the present, and is never absent from the human psyche.

Understanding and coping with displacement and disinherittance is vital to the forming of perceptions of self-identity. Confronting the past also prompts the recognition that, not only do places of origin – landscapes, create us, we create landscapes by our perceptions of them. Using the skeletal remains of dead lizards and other native creatures to ‘combine traditional and contemporary forms’ of artistic expression, Cheryl Moodai Robinson’s (#4) floor/door mat speaks eloquently of the effect of road-kill on the native animals. As a ritual act of burial for these creatures, it re-forms a (largely erased) ‘footprint’ to past ways of understanding and caring for the land and its creatures. Cheryl’s sentiments provided the basis for reflecting on our own actions: ‘As I tread lightly, seeing and hearing their stories I discover/uncover more of my Indigenous soul’.
Connection to place need not be experienced as specific or sedentary, and respect for Earth’s formations experienced in travel, across a lifetime represents a different and perhaps broader understanding of embodiment through relating to a deep embeddedness in nature. The influence of landforms on our psyche plays a large part in the work of artists in all four exhibitions, whose works give voice to ancient understanding that landscapes form our perceptions of self. Sue Wademan’s (2) Waterfall integrates her perception of the movement of water over land as both ‘powerful and beautiful’ into a possible way of being. On viewing her beautiful rendition of New Zealand’s Milford sound, it is possible to find an elemental invocation to the Element of water in the inspirational story for her creation. Hanging high, and using hand-dyed silk organza heavily free-machine embroidered:

> If we were to become as water we would flow and fall, not hesitating at the edge of life’s crevices and cliffs, but race forward with not a thought of the ‘danger’ below. Like water on its journey, we would fly off the edge to be in all our glory, as the cascading beauty of a waterfall, trusting that if we didn’t ‘jump’ we would miss the opportunity to experience the journey of our lifetime!

**Embodiment: women sourcing self as source**

As did the women who participated in the Soul Seasons workshops, many of the artists indicated their alienation from cultural concepts that inform their identity as women. The power of women’s life-giving energy (and its invisibility within contemporary paradigms) is a theme that consistently returns, from transferring the age-old sacred mythology of Maiden, Mother and Crone (Solomon #1), to reflections on the daily monotony of household chores that keep the home fires burning. Time and place are again conflated by the comparison of image with the title of Sue Dennis’ work dom.estic.com – chained to the sink (Dennis #2), in which she blends past and present using commercial ‘Chux’ cleaning cloths to form a traditional quilt pattern known as the Irish Chain. The second in this series was shown at the 2001 exhibition as dom.estic.com-home sweet home (Dennis #3). Using a simulated log cabin block construction, and again the revelation of a painted wadding background in place of the usual convention of piecing a top
layer to reveal the design, the regular formation of the blocks housing a symbol of the domesticated heart is disrupted by the imposition of an outstretched and gloved hand – frustrated, angry, questioning?

The creative process can be felt on a deeply personal level, while recognizing a universal relevance. In a conversation with Larraine Scouler (#2) about the two works on exhibition she recounts how they took form through ‘her experience of dealing with blocks and hurdles the system places on mature women.’ In constructing the quilts, she ‘works through the process, meditates and mulls over the fabrics as they evolve before her eyes.’ *Don’t fence me in*’ is a traditional medallion quilt (starting with a central block), which ‘changed as it went along’. She expressed ‘having problems with the centre; it was me, not just me, but other groups becoming stereotyped by what has been.’ But the work became clearer as the ‘repetitive themes were re-explored, as the borders moved outward into unbounded space.’ In the end the original centre was replaced, changed in order to adjust the overall ‘artistic balance’ of the quilt.

As stated above, the exhibition of one’s creation is a deeply revealing act, and artists surely recognise that giving voice through their artwork is both a political and personal act of self-identification and transformation. In thinking about what the future might hold for her, Lyn Ward (#2) has created a 3 dimensional robe from scraps of fabric, beads and found objects, ‘…coming from a desire to honour and celebrate the cycles of never-ending renewal, which comes out of the dark… and the light that shines from a woman’s experience and comes from trusting an inner intuitive wisdom.’ The method used for creating *She who shines in the dark* became ‘a movement out of the restrictions I hold over myself – gradually meeting them, disentangling, untying all the knots threaded through my body and being – a weaving into my life of balance, and courage… to meet my true intuitive soul.’ Her story continues ‘…out of the depths – from the tearing and tying, pinning and sewing, arranging and placing together of all the component parts – she appears, ragged, rough and shimmering!’
In an internet conversation with Alison Muir (#2), one of the exhibiting artists of *re-fabricating the future*, the underpinning motivation for her triumphant quilt *Short Poppies are valuable too* was revealed as a personal experience of hitting the ‘glass ceiling’ in the workplace, which considerably influenced her self-esteem. Through the quilt she makes a visible ‘statement for the twenty-first century’, envisioning a culture that has a place for every person, as one that is nurturing and caring – and one that creates beauty.

**Self-as-other: inclusive and reciprocal relationships**

In her opening address at the *re-fabricating indigenous spirit* exhibition, Annie Byron commented on the uniqueness of the works and the diverse response to theme. She also spoke of seeing the connecting threads between the responses by the artists: ‘…of being a woman, being a migrant, of difference being an enrichment, not a threat’. In the press release for the 2001 exhibition to celebrate and honour women’s lives, emergent themes are written about as creating connections, evoking recognition through shared experiences and longings.

The life stories that have given inspiration to the creations are as varied and unique as each artist. They will nevertheless evoke memories of personal crisis and change, challenges and healing, as well as those feelings associated with the more universal and archetypal cycles of life. There are images that enliven environmental dreamings, imagining a sense of place for an emerging Australian consciousness for today as we discover the connections between the layers of our lives. The exhibition is a celebration of the ingenuity and diversity of women’s creative spirit, a transformation of the more mundane and less obvious creativity of daily experience into symbolic visual form of colour and texture, shape and design...

(Annie Byron)

‘Relationality’ (as distinct from nationality) was a theme present in all four exhibitions as blood kinship, friendship, pets loved, land lost and regained, cultural icons, and dreams for the future, each contributing to the Creation of a sense of identity. After experimenting with natural dyes, Marion Curry (#3) saw in
the cloth two faces, perhaps in binary opposition, writing that ‘…. they represent Aboriginal, European or Asian faces…men and women.’ In the dying process the ethereal images are crossed by strong lines – bars, which Curry interprets as ‘barriers’ to a reconciliation process, but the image she has created confirms a conviction that ‘… bars are not as strong as people think and they will eventually disintegrate, leading to the birth of a new Australia.’

Sentiments reflecting a deep relationship to self-as-other, presenting foundations for an imaginary of reciprocity in community, are also expressed by other artists. Rhonda Rettke (#2) uses bright, conflicting colour ways to create and image that recognises the ‘continuing process’ in Australia of ‘a wide range of cultures living and working together – blending together to make one nationality.’ Relating to events and circumstances of her own life to the wider context, Christa Sanders (#3) creates an image of deep sea calm to express the need to resolve the ‘conflict within opposites’, and acknowledge our ‘differences in common. It would make sense to respect them, since our common humanity lies within these differences.’

Continuity was an important conceptual influence, expressed in a wide range of contexts. For Fiona Wright (#4), amongst others, uses land formations to reflect the way people relate, and in some way to map our inner life. She describes the landscape…

> with its many shapes and textures resonates to our inner life… our inner life is linked to our outer location. We are all somewhat like a mountain: insular, separate. But just as our emotional life flows around us, where it moves streams of life arise, and so connections are formed through fertile valleys with other mountains.

Using fabrics that were ‘remnants of past projects’ to form a quilt based on the traditional Celtic knot block, Louise Duvernet’s (#2) quilt supports ‘the chains of friendship which grow out of creative endeavour.’ The fabrics themselves have significance and are chains that ‘form a matrix in which we thrive…impos(ing) no limits, (they) just offer support as we each strive for our true fulfillment.’
Other quilts are expressions of grief, experienced in the dark times of change that is embodied through the lifecycle. For Yvonne Voss (#3) a deep connection to other was felt through the loss of ‘a beautiful daughter-in-law to a serious illness’. The artists indicate that the creative process is a healing (wholng, as in bringing the parts back together) process. The quilt she makes embodies the process of the family dealing with a feeling of ‘futility and injustice’ through the combination of ‘irregular shapes into one whole…like the life experiences we as a family all being together…to deal with this crisis.’

Another quilt, (traditional in form and concept, being a bed quilt for her daughter’s twenty-first year) from Larraine Scouler (#3) documents personal connections forged through family, place and community. It is a graphic record of photographs and other symbolic representations of family and friends and significant occasions. The need to remember ‘the sad times’ in the changing cycles, ‘the ordinary and the mundane occasions not documented’, became evident to the family and a daughter’s life in progress (the subtitle of the quilt). Through Happiness and Sorrow, Scouler calls us to confront the past as a way into the present, even though the faded photos of ancestors ‘hide more secrets than they reveal…recording the event without revealing the memories. Her jubilant realization that ‘– I am left to make of them what I can!’ becomes an act of self-in-Creation, evidenced by the bold, bright and balanced design of her quilt. The multiple responses to the themes of the exhibitions indicate that a sense of self-identity is bestowed in the act of revelation and discovery through a personal creative process that celebrates diversity as a space in which to recognise unifying principles – experiences that connect. It is possible to sense the artists working creatively as an act of giving reverence to Creation – as women, as a community, sourced and resting in deep reciprocal relationship.

**Celebrating life cycles: change in constancy**

Celebration of change and constancy as integral to self-in-Creation is expressed in many different ways and contexts. As suggested above (in Ancestral
connections) continuity with the past is a dominant theme throughout the exhibitions, reflected on by the artists in a variety of contexts, physical and emotional. The quilt is always metaphor and metaform - meta[ph]ormic of the process of change, connecting to the past and envisioning the future. Combining the two terms ‘metaphor’ and ‘metaform’ to become Grahn’s ‘meta[ph]orm, which emphasises their deep connection in the creative process as ebb and flow, movements of pendulum-like reversal between and idea expressed as metaphor and its expression as lived form - experiential knowledge with outcomes. It also indicates that the perception that we bring and perspective applied are not fixed, and in constant negotiation with what is perceived. Meta[ph]orm may act as catalyst to both metaphor and form. This is the way that I see an artwork operating. Deb Leake (#2) makes a comment about the ‘recycling’ of ‘our continuing fascination’ with quilts, acting as bridges between past and future, recycling the past for the creation of the future we want. Even though they are no longer necessary as functional items, ‘old skills are given new relevance’ to express perceptions of our lived experiences.

Like life, we make it up as we go along, adding bits when we run out, patching up the mistakes and getting on with it (Deb 2000).

Recognition of the gift of repetition in daily experience, and its diversity, are evident in two other quilts that recycle of ‘the everyday tie’. Deborah McArdle’s (#3) materials are unknown quantities, ‘rescued from oblivion in op-shops’ and given ‘a new form to adorn our world and enrich our lives.’ She brings them together from their disparate backgrounds to create a new pattern, to give them another round in the cycle. Enid Paddon-Rowe’s (#3) wall quilt of neckties (made in collaboration with Alison Muir) celebrates a career spent working for the United Nations for Australia, the design of which implies a wealth of repetitive daily experience using the structured pattern of small 3D boxes, exalting in the knowledge that the sum of the parts is never greater than the whole in the greater cycle.
Perhaps indicative of our unconscious alienation, physical and mental, from acknowledging the natural cycles of change through birth, death and regeneration, the works of some of the exhibitors reflect the anxiety that can be associated with change. There is nevertheless a strong sense of the constancy sometimes expressed as faith, sometimes as persistence, but always as manifest in and through a necessary transformation – made visible in the final formation of a quilt. In Deborah Brearly’s work *Holding on to* (#3) a central panel shows her hands juxtaposed with a dragonfly, symbolic of her dealing with ‘a time of change in my life...nothing was sure any more...everything was at cross roads.’ The sense of her disquietude is less apparent than the realisation of the consequent re-creation of herself. On completion of the quilt ‘after a long sojourn’, and reflection brought her to ‘...a realization that the only thing one can be sure of is change.’ As an insect that ‘has existed in much the same form since prehistoric times,’ the dragonfly came to represent her own ‘resilience’ in being adaptable and receptive to change.

To be able to adapt and be receptive to change is to be like a dragonfly!
They fly high and travel far! (Deborah)

The quilt by Yvonne Voss (#3) exemplifies the integration of process and its realisation in change and growth. In its vibrant colours and torn edges, *Sky Glow* embodies the anger, grief and frustration experienced at the unexpected passing of life of a loved one. Her quilt describes visually the loss of ‘a beautiful daughter-in-law to a serious illness’. For her, the quilt she makes embodies the process of the family dealing with a feeling of ‘futility and injustice’ through placing a combination of ‘irregular shapes into one whole...like the life experiences we as a family all being together...to deal with this crisis.’

Adelaide artist, Alvena Hall (#4) presents an image of loss and continuity through the four small cameos called *The Farina Series*, showing the effect of establishing community without a strong foundational connection with and understanding of the habits of the local environment. Her work tells the story and evokes memories by the techniques she uses: scraps found at the site of the
deserted lands, digital embroidery from traditional damask weave that ‘evokes the civilized aspirations of the long-gone inhabitants.’ Hall’s work shows the need to be in careful and constant relationship with land, and to respect its vicissitudes – even to celebrate them, as did nineteenth century bush poet, John Shaw Neilson. A quilt from her Mallee series, exhibited in the 2001 exhibition (#3) again encourages us to understand our connection with the land as we see two swimmers through a line of devastation caused by fire. Hall integrates, literally (in)scribes into the piece, the poetry of John Shaw Neilson who lived in this area and developed a deep respect for its changing constancy (see Davies 2000).

Confronting unknown barriers is recognised in a variety of contexts and visual representations by exhibiting artists. One artist to express transition and transformation over an extended period of time is Dianne Firth. As visible markers along the journey towards gaining a PhD, Black Hole (#3) and Blue Waves (#4) are visual pointers for the movement from a space where Firth feels that she is falling into a black hole, where ‘self-confidence is strained’, creating ‘an anxiety bordering on despair’ to a sense of relief. In the former work it is clear that the creative process becomes a means to ‘convey a sense of direction, focus and intensity of effort that suddenly disappears into the blackness… only to re-emerge.’ In 2002, the year following the successful completion of the doctoral thesis, while maintaining integrity of expressive style, Firth’s emotional state has visibly changed, with the waves of the ocean calm, rolling over and embracing all that has gone before. It is a thanks-giving, the artist’s expression of ‘homage’ to the ocean and childhood memories of elemental water that ‘remains a fundamental part of my own indigenous spirit.’

Ever-present in all the exhibitions was the sense of celebration, noted in an article written for Downunder Quilts.

Perhaps the feeling most consistently represented and recalled throughout the 3 exhibitions has been that of celebration - the celebration of life. The works of Blue Mountains artists, Larraine Scouler and Denise Trent were indicative of this mood. Using the flying geese format, Scouler’s ‘Crazy for Orange’ declares the love of the colour orange to be more than a passing phase. It has become for her ‘a comfort zone’, both compelling and exciting, expressing her ‘need to be different’. Revelling in the wide variety
of traditional cloths available, and applying masses of beads and decorative stitching to crazy patch blocks, Trent constructed a ‘Toran’ to rival the most elaborate celebratory cloth (October 2001).

As a simple statement of and revelry in being herself, Scouler’s work in re-fabricating our lives is in full contrast to the crazy-patch technique applied by Denise Trent, yet both are a celebration of life on a personal level (biophilia), of being in relationship with self and other, and, as such are visually enriching and exciting. Scouler (#3) records coming to a personal realisation of her ‘need to be different’ through her love of the colour orange, while Trent (#3) loves the inspiration offered by the huge diversity of textile traditions across the world’s cultures, whether they are used in functional ways, or for decorative or symbolic applications. The sheer exuberance of her threads and stitching, her palette of colours and textural weaves, remind us that ‘the more we are open to the influences of other cultures, the more enriched our lives will be.’

Another striking image developed through colours, forms and balance, is that of Elizabeth Oates’ (#3) quilt to her ‘little dog Lilly’, which serves as a memorial and celebration of the cycles of life. It was a passing made ‘even more tragic as it followed the death of my mother whom I loved dearly.’ The symbols represented in the quilt are derived from ancient stone circles and the ‘universal spiral…the all encompassing circle of life and death’, and are indicative of regeneration of human spirit, its tenacity and closeness to nature. The use of these symbols and ‘the process of focusing my creative energy’ brought a healing that is resonant with a psycho-spiritual re-birth. Naming the confusion that often results from unexpected disruptions to the structures and routines established in her life as mother and woman,

Jennifer Rolfe (#3) refers to the creative process as ‘vital for integrating and facilitating connection with myself and the universal Divine Feminine’ particularly when ‘dealing with the ebb and flow of living within the many roles fulfilled as a woman, and feeling confusion that often results from unexpected disruptions to
the structures, routines and timetables that are part of being a mother.’ The process of making this quilt revealed the psycho/spiritual importance of creating as providing the opportunity to see daily life as ‘part of a cycle within cycles, chaos within structure…always filled with mysticism.’

Starting with an idea, Loani Lee’s (#4) adaptation of the style of abstract expressionism to her quilting provides the modality for recognizing her celebration of traditional quilting whilst engaging in the creative dynamic that is consistency in change. It is clear from the shimmering simplicity of her quilt *Desire and Resistance* that she has a strong relationship with the tradition that is patchwork quilting, ‘the rationale being that if you cannot envision the past you cannot anticipate the future.’ Like so many of the other works, this piece is a clear meta[ph]orm of a transition, a transformation that represents ‘an evolvement’ whilst maintaining connection with ‘the original idea or theme.’ For Loani, creating is a process of ‘reinventing our own indigenous spirit,’ stemming from her having a ‘firm foothold in tradition whilst endeavouring to push boundaries.’ For Loani Lee, the process of creating is itself a process of recovery and restorying a precious heritage:

If the quilt is a metaphor for life then the devolvement of the quilt into a new form while remembering its origins is re-fabricating the traditional cultural spirit of quilting – and because a quilt is a metaphor, reinventing our own indigenous spirit (Loani).

**Making the invisible visible: embodied creativity**

Engaging in a worldwide theme for the year of the millennium for the second exhibition, the questions to the artists point directly to a personal role in the creation story: ‘What stories will our textile arts contribute to the overall creation story of the 21st century? Does our purpose in producing art …show the changes we wish to see in the world?’ Similarly, the third exhibition in the series, ‘re-fabricating our lives’, grounds the creative experience of ‘melding past memories and future dreams into the way we are making meaning in the context of our lives currently’. The theme of being actively involved in the larger creation story is
developed in this exhibition. It is a call to consciousness that, we are ‘co-creators of the world we live in, patching both past and future into our creative pursuits, piecing together a story that reveals our capacities for self-creation’. It suggests that the art we make ‘can release us from the ‘already’, familiar containments of life into…the possibility of transformation brought about by our innate capacity to create.’ It positions the artist as purveyor of possibility, facing the crossroads and contributing to the evolutionary creation story through our art.

The creative process as sacred process for the artists in the re-fabricating exhibitions is again expressed in a wide variety of ways and contexts. The term ‘spirit’ is to be found in many of the scripts that accompany the works. Coming from my use of the word as it is used in the chapter on the workshops as describing the fifth element of self-in-Creation, a way of being, spirit was considered the best way to evoke the meta[ph]orm that is an ancient and emergent sense of a consciousness that represents an embodied creative involvement in deep relationship with nature, self and other – a place/space for reversing perceptions away from the ‘disguising fictional’ art (so named by Gottner-Abendroth), towards a feminist aesthetic that sees the experience of spirit expressed through spiritual practices that are process-oriented, subjectively personal in reciprocal relationship and experienced as embodied.

While knowing differentiation and separation – naming as verbal and visual, inviting memory and creating a sense of identity in time and space, some artists relate to both a deepening understanding of self and the creative process as providing a sort of visibility to the source from which we become disconnected in our ‘naming’ – the ancestral void, the creative still-point. With a less personally oriented approach, Yvonne Chapman (#4) commented:

By doing all those thousand stitches, like thoughtful footsteps, I reach deep down into the creative soul and reconnect with ancient timeless imagination, returning my offerings… weaving our sacred stories into the fabric of our daily lives (Yvonne).
As is common to the ethos of textile artists, materials are often shared or exchanged, and the work for Lyn Ward, working with others – either working with other women, as in the installation described below, or by including fabrics collected from others, Lyn’s Hip Art (#4) celebrates the notion of ‘cosmetikos’ as sacralising art, where adornments are used to participate in the sacred, for safety and allurement, and identification with the community (Grahn 1993). As types of initiation garments, the belts they were made ‘for enjoyment and celebration’, as adornments particularly to be worn in ritual intent where there is a sacred meeting of spirit and body realized for her as ‘connection to place, space and land’. The belts are a celebration of the gaining of identity through dissolution and separation that reveals the sacred from the profane for the good of self in community, and celebrating the change that is in constancy. Lyn describes her ‘feminine cyclic wisdom’ as ‘the process of entering more and more into the unfolding and expression of authentic self, my soul’s purpose.’

In the work described here, Lyn collaborated with three other to create an installation piece. She had commented to me in conversation that the exhibitions ‘hold the space for gathering together women’s work’, and as a collection of women’s worlds they are ‘discussions done visually’, where witness is given to each others’ process. In recognition of the sacredness of their day-to-day activities, four women who created the installation piece entitled It’s just what we do (#3) in the 2001 exhibition, re-fabricating our lives, engaged in their own collective imaginary as divinely creative women in preparing the component parts and then assembling the work in the area I had designated for them in the gallery. They had worked on individual aspects of the layered form, and discussed its significances as their thoughts and ideas clarified and grew in the process of preparation over several months. In order to bring the metaphor of the various aspects of their collaboration into form – coming from ‘varied backgrounds’, being ‘drawn together by our children, then further through our journeying as women...exploring the forces of the seasons’, they honoured these everyday connections by ritually installing the artwork in the gallery. After calling
the elements and creating sacred space, memories of ‘moments of vulnerability, awkwardness and fear… balanced by times of anticipation… sheer delight and wonder through play’ took the meta[ph]orm in the shape of a tripod made of collected tree branches in which they placed symbols of their lived experiences, collected and created objects of personal and mutual significance to be included in their installation.

A strong sense of realizing themselves to be in an act of sacred creation was evoked by their deliberations about the placing of the objects, the direction for pouring the sand, the points of the elements in their directions. They then worked cooperatively to place such components as birds’ feathers, a handkerchief belonging to one of their grandmothers, pegs, red sand collected on a trip to the center of Australia, and many other seemingly disparate items. The description of the creation of the centre circle of hand-felted fabric speaks metaphorically of their creative processes: ‘by pouring water, symbol of the emotional substance of our lives onto wool lovingly placed, the liquid, chaotic meshing, slowly came to life as a solid form of strength and beauty.’ The process was clearly as important as the outcome, which stood in the centre of the room as testimony to women’s lives, as a parthenogenetic act of re-generation of self-in-relationship to other that manifested a sacralising biophilia.

Writing of her work *Odyssey in Transparency*, Jo Steele (#1) makes specific reference in her Creation Story to the spiritual dimension of selfhood, experienced in the process of creating and expressed through her work. Remembering that the materials she is working with: wire and thread, a medium that she used to re-fabricate her memories, she writes: ‘It has something to do with the invisible and the tangible, seemingly contradictory, yet somehow harmonious’, an apt description of the mesh between the ideas and materials used in this work. This artist also indicates the future focus of her work – changes in the direction of her creative expression as a result of it being a ‘spiritual/textile journey’. She has come to…
an acceptance of my spiritual self (that) has given greater significance to my work in fibre and taken me on a phase of my journey, which is renewing the inspiration and energy of my work. We often think of the spirit as transparent, invisible – we don’t see it, but with insight it is tangible.

In an article written for Ozquilt Network Newsletter (2001), I had asked the artists to consider how we might authentically visualise and make visible an ‘indigenous spirit’, asking them to consider the notion of the artist as creator of culture. Evidence pointing to an awareness of such a perception is difficult to identify from the artists’ creation stories, though I have had conversation with several of the artists in which they have mentioned being aware of a spiritual aspect to their work, and that the conceptual nature of the themes pushes them to break new ground conceptually themselves. Many of the artists used the term ‘spirit’ in their creation stories, giving the sense of its meaning as ‘a way of being in the world, towards self and other’, a set of values to live by. June Brown (#4) refers to a ‘spirit of care and determination’ inherited from her maternal grandmother, Louisa Ellis, who embodied this spirit. There is a visceral sense of a long distanced memory of the ‘spirit’ in the art-stories shared by these artists, referred to by Annie Byron as she held ritual space with a member of Australia’s original peoples, of being ‘…a native, to belong naturally to the Earth – She is Mother to us all’, which is celebrated through an embodied response to the changing seasons and the constancy of soul/spirit and in re-cognising the creativity of our daily lives.

Re-turning to the centre: being at the edge

From the standpoint of the research methodology, it is not necessary to provide watertight compartments for all the artworks exhibited over the four-year period of the research. I have tried to indicate patterns within the responses, and, like a typical quilt formed from the juxta-positioning of two blocks using contrasting and blending colour ways, the range of response is as varied as the number of works on exhibition, (also to be gauged by the reader’s experience in responding to the images in the Appendices). From my viewing of the artworks and readings of the
artists’ stories it is clear that the exhibitions were an opportunity to comment through their work, which was perceived as taking personal agency for enacting change in the personal and social domains.

When asked about the accessibility of the curatorial theses, artist Lyn Ward spoke of them as a ‘catalyst’ by means of which responses could become ‘deeply personal’ as part of the profoundly transformational process that occurs in the making (and viewing) of art. From my perspective, the range of response to the re-fabricating indigenous spirit exhibition (#4) both confirmed and belied expectation, ranging from being ‘simply incomprehensible’ to the response by an Indigenous Australian who was exhibiting saying that we are ‘all indigenous to somewhere’ (Cheryl Moodai Robinson, #4). On the other hand an Anglo-Australian woman said she felt, that given the way ‘the claims of Australia’s Indigenous Peoples went unmet and ignored, it was too early to be claiming the word indigenous.’ This particular theme seemed to present a greater challenge than the earlier themes. I had originally inserted the possessive pronoun ‘own’, which had followed ‘our’ in the title, but on reflection realised that this would indeed create too much tension because of the notion of exclusion that it might present. Since my presentation of a paper over a decade earlier at the Worldwide Conference of Indigenous Peoples, I had long been aware of the tension between the two divisive perspectives that these comments highlighted. I discussed my reservations and concerns with others, and received a communication from another exhibitor who felt that the context of a theme exploring indigenous consciousness presented an opportunity ‘to build bridges and acknowledge commonality alongside individuality and autonomy’, which she added ‘is surely what creativity and spirit are all about’.  

44 Conscious of the protocol that acknowledges the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the local Aboriginal Cultural Resource Centre was contacted in order to both invited works for the exhibition, and to discuss my use of the term ‘indigenous’, spelt using the lower case. We had a long and helpful conversation, during which I was nevertheless accused of being racist, which was also accompanied by an apology.
Others said that they had to ‘think quite deeply, going beyond their ‘usual stretch of imagination’ to address the concept, and the more they thought about it ‘the more memory arose, strengthening a sense of self, of identity and a growing sense of belonging.’ I came to see a connection between these different perspectives and implications as presenting the possibility for encountering some sense of commonality, initially through the act of recognising what may have seemed an impassable/insurmountable dichotomy. It offered the possibility for a shift in conscious focus where the visual medium combined the paradoxical function of presenting the universal or archetypal with an intuited response - using vision to engage with the ‘language of the unseen’, where opposing viewpoints can be held in balance without negation. The responses expressed on this occasion were also indicative of the other exhibitions, (expressed over the years in conversation with the artists). It seems that the curatorial themes demanded a re-visioning, an auto-chthonic ‘calling up’ of self-in-Creation in order to bring into form dreams and aspirations, and arrive at a position of being enabled through art-making to make new connections; by metaphorically staying at the edge by going back to the stillpoint at the centre in order to arrive at new understandings – to find the gap and make place for (re-)new(ed) visions of consciousness perceiving itself.

PART 2

Creation on the Wheel of the Year is available through re-turning to a sensed re-cognition of the interdependence of dark and light in place. It requires the meta[ph]ormic movement between edge and centre, being in the still-point of the creative void and dancing the re-turn to manifestation. This is often achieved through meditation, of which the creative process is one form. The quilts themselves provide the space for contemplation, and some point directly to the possibility of finding the space at the source that is self-in-Creation. The quilt of Dianne Firth (#2) has been referred to above in the context of time and memory. In contemplating the structure of this quilt, the viewer becomes aware of a
moving centre, one that is not fixed and does not recede into a distant and inaccessible ‘vanishing point’. In a similar way my Coincidence of Opposites (#4), the quilt made to envision the dynamic experienced on the Wheel of the Year, posits the viewer in a space that is both peripheral and central, a standpoint from which to experience an understanding of self-in-Creation. Nerida Richmond Benson’s Zen Quilt (#2) has a similar effect – of providing the viewer with the space to wander (and wonder, as another artist described the sensation) at a periphery that takes one to the centre. The image at the centre is the ever-changing triple spiral, showing constancy in change, the space of the gap, and gives visible form to the sacred act of self-in-creation-with-other. This dynamic is explored in the following section by considering the construction of visual-ability through the reception of the works exhibited in the four exhibitions.

Addressing the large number of visitors at the opening of the 2002 exhibition, re-fabricating indigenous spirit, actor and author Annie Byron referred to the number of different entry points the artists found to the theme ‘…to delight the senses and thrill the intellect. There’s politics if you look – challenges to our lack of respect of nature, and songs of appreciation of nature… There’s consciousness that ancestor spirit has governed this land for millennia, and that we also are custodians. There is depth of feeling. As one of the artists says: art helps make spirit visible.’ Annie also pointed the diverse landscapes so present in the works on exhibition ‘… landscapes of the earth, of place, but also of inner landscape, of family connections, acknowledgement of the ancestors and their presence in the present.’

**The re-fabricating exhibitions revisited: responding to vision**

One of the visible outcomes of creating and curating the exhibitions on an annual basis during the course of the research project has been a growing recognition of the art quilt as legitimate art form in the textile arts in Australia. In these exhibitions, recognition is given to ‘original, unique and innovative methods incorporating impressive craftsmanship and technical prowess’ (entry form), and
it is acknowledged that women desire to have their ‘voices’ recorded and heard, expressed through an area that has not only been assigned to them in the field of the arts, but which they are indeed reclaiming as a valuable and active site. Through their textile art, they are reclaiming and giving voice to their everyday experiences and concerns, their driving passions, often one and the same, their interpretation of themselves and their place in its creation. The exhibitions may be seen as an uncovering, an unveiling, a revealing, a re-versal, maybe a sub-version and revolution. They are another turn of the Wheel as a subversion from patriarchal ideas that arose in the northern hemisphere that insist on predominance and exclusion in the name of a male god as Father and genius as inherited and the expression of the individual over other as paramount to gaining identity. They were intended to lead to the uncovering of desire of the women participating in the exhibitions, to celebrate a feminist framework for research and analysis that embraces cooperation, diversity and plenitude, and provide evidence of an eroticism of connection through touch. In other words, the exhibitions offered the possibility to re-volutionise perception and percept-ability through the art experience that sees through the disguising fiction that covers over the expression of thought as visual metaphor that disconnects the perceiver from the perceived. The artworks themselves embody this realization and understanding when as viewers we step into the space they provide by their own embeddedness in the process of representing and re-creating. They embody a perspective and offer the space for renewing visions for world in which the structures of relationships may be seen from a different perspective.

**Collective (re-)stor(y)ing**

Although solo and group exhibitions are often given a title to indicate style, content or general theme, it is not necessarily the convention with the exhibition of quilts, which may be the collection of a group membership and as such be exhibited by that title. The intention in creating curatorial themes for the re-

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45 I have used this reconstruction as it stands in recognition of the various ways the word has been unpacked and restructured many times: Glenys Livingstone (2003) uses it to suggest our on-going process of living with and in the stories we create; and Judy Pinn in *Changing Places* (2003) to describe her process of restor(y)ing a sense of place.
fabricating exhibitions was to directly seek representations of women’s creative textiles and explore audience responses that might elicit a perceiving consciousness immersed in the fullness of the creative process. My decision to follow the convention of including statements about their works from the artists supported the same consideration. During the exhibitions, a complete text of the artists’ statements was available in limited copies for use in the gallery. Nevertheless, I was keen to subvert the cultural tendency to read first and look later, which would interrupt the ‘all-at-once’, visceral and embodied experience that informs understanding, (and so I encourage preliminary viewing of the exhibitions in the Appendices). It was made known to me by a visitor to the re-fabricating exhibitions that she often felt overwhelmed on entering a gallery where there was little or no indication of the artists’ intentions, leaving only the option of minimal, or very subjective responses to the artworks. She said that she felt prepared by the themes of the re-fabricating exhibitions. She felt that individual, subjective, and/or stereotypic responses were less likely to be ‘forced’ onto an image, but could became part of the ‘conversation’ with the image through their statement, and thereby lead to a new insights.

In curating the four exhibitions for the research project I relied on my own intuition regarding the order of hanging, through which I considered such factors as colour, design and thematic compatibility between pieces. It was important that all works submitted were included, as together they formed a collective response to the theme for each exhibition, creating a new imaginary. My role in conjuring the exhibitions was to provide the space so that this ‘collective imaginary’ could be made visible, so that it could stand as testimony to the visions of its creators, and interact with those who visited the space. The space thus created would provide the opportunity for observing a collective (re-)stor(y)ing for other perceptions of reality.

The idea for this term as it might be applied to the exhibitions is derived of course from Jung’s ‘collective unconscious’ to indicate the subliminal state of consciousness holding previously unrecognised responses. It has been used by Bronwyn Davies to indicate the positive values of recognizing commonalities of human experience, who refers to a collective biography (2000). Another visitor to the exhibitions referred to the art works as a ‘collective dreaming’.
Art as embodied story

Thinking about another way of seeing, a way that ‘didn’t depend on rectangles’ or frames, a ‘window perception’ that excludes the viewer, David Hockney writes:

Perspective is a theoretical abstraction that was worked out in the fifteenth century. It suddenly altered pictures. It gave a strong illusion of depth. It lost something and gained something. At first the gain was thrilling, but slowly, very slowly, we became aware of what had been lost. That loss was the depiction of the passing of time. We thought this way of looking was so true that when the photograph came along it seemed to confirm perspective. Of course, it was going to confirm perspective because it was exactly the same way of looking, from one central point with one eye fixed in time (1999, p. 95).

If it is true that perspective is a learnt perception, and that there is an intimate connection between belief and perception that is both culturally induced and reinforces culture, (while held to be biologically determined), what we see and how we learn to see it are in direct correlation in a participating consciousness that presents the possibility of recognising the framework and looking beyond it. Perception represents ‘the meeting place of interiority and exteriority’ and the whole body is involved in perception embedded in space and different viewing points experienced, many reversal of perspective (Sewell 1999, p. 35). Far from there being a diminishment of perception, as the eye strains towards infinite space outside the picture towards a consciousness of the transcendent, visibility is made clear when the viewer is brought to a sensual interaction with the immediacy of the image, into a consciousness of the immanent as an embodied act of being, an intense, immanent experience of one’s self as source-in-relationship.

Images into words: visitors creating

Responses from visitors to the exhibitions were audio taped and transcribed, or noted in the gallery’s Visitors’ Book or by myself after conversations with visitors to the gallery. The interviews were largely made in response to a request from me, though several occurred spontaneously. Most were one-on-one conversations as we walked through the gallery to view the art works; several
were conducted with an extra person interacting in the discussion. Unlike the interviews with the workshop participants, who were provided with a set of guidelines for consideration several weeks prior to being interviewed, there was no textual format for visitors to the re-fabricating exhibitions other than the art works themselves, (and the artists’ Creation Stories). The creative work of the artists was the primary text, and I decided that, in order to minimize the incursion of my impressions, the interviews would be held as a conversation. This is not to say that I did not interact with the comments being made, but I was conscious of not wanting to have to explain my position either as curator or responder. Nevertheless, I was keen understand what the art works in exhibition were communicating to the viewer. The question of ‘how’ with regard to technique and design was of secondary consideration for me, though of course added interest and texture to the responses; sometimes a very analytical approach to design techniques inhibited an articulation of a sensual, holistic response.

The interviews were initiated by a general inquiry about the person’s overall impressions of the exhibition. Did it meet expectations as a response to the theme? Was there anything that stood out, or that was brought to attention by the art works? Other questions related to perception/percept-ability: whether the works on exhibition had influenced a perception of how the theme had been or might be interpreted; whether they had influenced or altered perception in any way. The interview process occurred while physically moving through the exhibition to look at the works while talking. Since the main structure giving form to the conversation were the art works themselves (usually supplemented by the artists’ personal stories provided in the catalogues), personal preference for particular works often spontaneously directed the course of the conversation. In this way the responder was leading the conversation, and links could be made and themes identified according to their own perception.

47 Over 40 people responded to the request to comment on the works in the exhibitions over the four years. Approximately 20 hours of taped interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed.
At the fourth exhibition, *re-fabricating our indigenous spirit*, a need to direct a more specific question to the interviewees become apparent. Though I was aware that only a few individuals had seen all four of the exhibitions, it seemed a necessary step in order to pull together an impression of the effect of the previous exhibitions for myself, a step towards drawing my own conclusions about the overall impact of the project. Some interviewees had seen all the exhibitions, and I was interested to see how they might combine impressions – if there was a sense of continuity. Again, the question was posited verbally and invited the person to consider whether the exhibition had influenced, altered or developed their perception of ‘indigenous spirit’, as elicited by the art works. As can be seen below by representations of the responses to this question, they varied in depth and complexity, and were personally and politically contextualised, also identified in some of the reactions to the theme by artists.

‘Spelling’ a perception of reality

A premise of this inquiry is that images themselves visually ‘spell’ and expose themes and intentions in a way that goes deeper than and beyond any written textual appraisal or critique. This premise rests in the possibility that the visual texts act as both metaphor and are an embodied metaform with the magical shamanic power to change perceptions. The play on the word ‘spell’ is intentional, evoking the possibility of other ways of seeing and hearing than literacy, as in being able to ‘read’ something, be it a book or an image. The original inferences associated with the word evoked a state of being which includes the body/mind/spirit trinity in interaction with what was ‘spelled’ – an entrance-ment of each other. The separation from the ‘wild and multiplicitous magic of an intelligent natural world’ was the result of greater dependence on the written word over European oral traditions (Abrams 1997, p.133; Schlain 1999). Visual text has the power to destroy and create. The visual metaphor as epistemological device is paradoxical in that it is both connective and disassociative, ‘…connect(ing) us to truth as it distances us from the corporeal’, functions which were originally entwined (as were art and craft). Using the
analogy of two separate ‘eyes’ to describe the split between body and mind. Harding asserts the result led to a ‘reliance on a hierarchy of the senses’ with the mind’s eye being predominant, privileging by objectifying and abstracting (Harding (1983, p. xvii).

Listening in an embodied way to the voices of these people bring us into inter-subjective relationship that belies the existence of the artworks as objectified texts standing on their own through artistic and technical merit, a perception that alienates and abstracts from an embodied, visceral art experience for viewers. Discussing the revaluing of experience, Shari Stone-Mediatore makes the point that experience, (like an art work) is ‘not a truth that precedes culturally given representations of experience, but is actually mediated by those representations’. Her emphasis that ‘visual experience is not mere reception of a reality but an active process informed by expectations’ reiterates the work of Laura Sewell that the process of perceiving is interactive and cyclical. Although appearing as if it simply reflected external reality, she posits a notion of experience that consists of contradictions and tensions, reactions that are ‘endured on multiple psychological and bodily levels.’ Taking this perspective, there is no need to rigidly enumerate or give priority to the multiple layers of experience, but simply to recognise it is the thickness, the multiplicity and in particular the tensions within experience that make it a re-source for seeing differently. It is the process of ‘rearticulating experience’ through the images that enables the viewer ‘to confront those experienced tensions more constructively’ (Stone-Mediatore, in Narayan and Harding 2000, pp.120).

**Re-constructing from the interviews**

I am conscious that there were as many interpretations to the works as those who came to visit the exhibitions (and as those view the exhibitions here). Nevertheless, in this process of listening to the voices through their comments I am seeking to identify the connections, and the gaps in which other connections may surface, the places where edges meet. Taking a feminist standpoint
approach to phenomenology, I understand the act of perception as a dynamic blend of receptivity and creativity that is experienced as the mutual interaction of deep communication. This approach is a reciprocal process, celebratory and sensual, radically participatory and communal. It is a way of seeing that ‘celebrates an engaged, receptive, responsive, ever-shifting, flexible and ultimately uncertain sense of reality… in which the thing seen has its own significance and reality’ (Sewell 1999, p.43). My approach to the interviewing process, and later to the re-viewing of these conversations, has been phenomenological in the sense of listening and looking for the experience of the responders that enables the claiming of subject-hood and sustains a sense of self in relation to place and other. I recognise that, even though constituted in the context of discursively constituted identities, there is room for an intervention on perception and understanding by and through the visceral domain – my embodied responsive reflections. I have done this not by making claim to expressing an authentic prediscursive self, but by recognising – in fact sensing categories of women’s identities within the narratives that are the re-fabricating exhibitions, as they identify and express, re-narrate in another form the often obscured experiences of the tensions within familiar social and cultural norms that women experience.

In the analysis of both the artists’ Creation Stories and the responses to the works provided in interview I have also been aware of the third relationship lingering always in the background – the interaction with the quilts themselves, and the interchange between two different text types. In considering my personal responses I have sought to encounter and represent a sense of the liminal zone of understanding, where a great part of the conversations may be said to have occurred. It is the space where ‘[M]ultiplicity underpins the space-in-between’ and discontinuity can become change, ‘…rather than being stuck in predetermined paradigms and mindsets’ (Pinn in Cameron 2003, p.42). Some of these responses will find points of overlap, settling in fertile soil for new growth through recognizing difference in order to identify connections. I am also aware of the
layers of percept-ability that have been forming during the time of the research, starting by revealing endogenous perceptions more consciously than that term generally implies. There are those that have come through considering and relating responses in interviews with workshop participants, reviewing participating artists’ responses to themes for the re-fabricating exhibitions through their visual and literary texts, and engaging with my own perspective on a spiritual feminist aesthetic through the literature. Rather than detracting from the analysis, it adds to the richness and depth of perception available in considering the proposal of the thesis.

It is clear that direct and irrefutable correlations with the earlier analyses of interviews with workshop participants in the previous chapter and the artists’ Creation Stories in the exhibitions shared here cannot be made, given their different contexts. Responses to the exhibitions are personal and often multi-faceted, which readers will perceive from engaging with their own reactions to reading and engaging with the art works. In order to keep the beauty, the variety and detail of these patches of spoken thoughts and feelings, as well as to show their relationship, I found myself resisting a perceived need to discuss the responses by closely sorting and categorizing, again since many of them could fit into more than one category. Does one try to assort so that they fit into boxes, or let the ‘boxes’ flow over them and see what they might be expressing? In spite of these considerations, after reviewing the responses given by participants in the workshops in relation to the artists’ creation stories, I noticed a depth of field, which brought to the fore several points of focus. Just as I would with patches of fabric in relation to the overall inspiration for the finished quilt being of prime importance, the overall inspiration of the inquiry was to look carefully for similarities and differences and make choices in order to discern patterns, connections or relationships. What may become visible through the patchwork of responses presented here, is a multiplicity of perceptions held together through the tension between the visible and invisible, just as shades of dark and light
serve to form a harmonious whole quilt – offering the possibility of ten thousand frames.48

As I have said, I am aware of interpretations that I bring to the words of the visitors to the exhibitions. The ancient symbol of the vesica piscis referred to in the introductory chapter is a primal symbol of the vessel for change and continuity as the cycling through birth and death, creation and destruction to renewal occurring within and through the body of woman. As a symbol of human understanding and experience of self in relation to environment and other, like the Wheel of the Year, it represents more: the eternal round of changing consciousness influencing perceptions as perceptions form consciousness. Sometimes represented as the lotus or rose, it is an ancient symbol of life-giving energies, and has represented the mystery that is life across cultures and over millennia (Walker 1983, p.1045). I am re-turning to this image of the vesica piscis as representing what may be called the context of the stillpoint – as a place experienced by as many as there are who see the artworks. It represents that which contains the other, is inclusive as it expels; it re-unites with and re-creates through an embodied and processional consciousness, a perspective that recognises the body/mind/spirit connection and the union between the sacred and the mundane. It is from this cyclic frame (or lens), mindful of and sensing the cyclic flow between darkness and light, between creation and destruction, between metaphor and metaform that I am presenting the responses to the exhibitions, with the expectation of making available the spaces in between for the present reader and viewer of the exhibitions. Again, it is recommended that the following be read and re-viewed in tandem with viewing the representations of the art works from the re-fabricating exhibitions.

Celebrating beauty and wholeness

Visitors to all four exhibitions responded with a sense of celebration, connection and nurturance that the art works conveyed. Comments certainly included words

48 ‘She of then thousand names’ is an ancient address to the Goddess principle of the divine principle.
of praise, extolling the skilful crafting of the women’s art, such as ‘…enjoyed the exquisite stitching’, ‘…colours and textures were wonderful’, ‘…plenty of diversity of line, colour and design’. Some gave extended analyses of the technical merits (or demerits) of individual pieces, usually in relation to the way this enabled their reading of the quilt’s narrative structure.\(^{49}\) Nevertheless, it is obvious to note that the techniques, colours, textures speak for themselves in eliciting the interpretations, summed in by such comments noted in the visitors’ book over the years as:

…a beautiful, rich collection of thought and craft skills and expression;
and

Stitched up! Exquisitely grounded in images of women’s lives.

The comments that are of interest to this project are those that were made regarding the experience of being at the exhibition, letting the works elicit an emotional response, present the opportunity for a recognising a change or deepening of perception. Such comments were plentiful, in words and phrases such as ‘an enriching experience’, ‘…just what I needed’, ‘joyful’, ‘inspirational’, and ‘contemplative’; ‘… a vacation for heart and mind’, ‘… very spiritual’, ‘… the richest soul food, bringing warmth and reassurance.’ One woman at the 2000 exhibition clearly expressed a shift in personal perception, writing in the visitors’ book:

I have found this exhibition to be a beautiful expression of a woman’s sacred values and common thread of creativity. Having never seen quilting in an exhibition before I am both impressed and opened just that little bit more. A warm sense of woman floats about and this is nurturing. (Anonymous 2000)

\(^{49}\) I have not included many of these details, only where it seemed appropriate. Only two of the interviewees tended to rely almost solely on the structural frame for the interpretations of the art works, mentioning their prior training in the elements of design. Others responded in a way that I would consider to be spontaneous and post-structural, by which I mean being in a reciprocal relationship with what they were viewing, perhaps being aware of but without giving precedence to the intervention of standard codes about beauty and design.
Affirming women’s life experiences as biophilic

The connection between women’s perceptions of self in relation to each other, affirming a sense of their ‘shared visions’ and indicating ‘patterns of relatedness’ deriving from a ‘refined imagination’ that refuses to project onto or defend and maintain the status quo was mentioned by many responders (Sewell 1999, pp. 248-9). One woman expressed recognition of the sisterhood of women through their shared experiences of marginalisation within the dominant frame, giving thanks to artists and curator in the visitors’ book:

…for bringing together materials and techniques that speak women’s ways of knowing in such a way that reveals their power and capacity to live and work beyond boundaries (Mary 2000).

The recognition of a self as woman in relation to self as other in relation to a world context came about through the narrative aspects of the quilts themselves, and the artists’ statements, engendering connections through identifying and bringing an individual perception to the situation.

I loved how some of the works told me a story. Also the story being told by the artist. I enjoyed this exhibition very much, especially because they were all created by women (Amanda 2000).

At the 2000 exhibition, a male visitor made a very clear written statement authentically identifying through the artwork women’s life-giving powers, and his integral participation in the act of creation. It was in response to Womanline (Solomon (#2) and has a sense of time and space having been suspended for him:

I was gazing at the installation when the significance of the bowls suddenly hit me. Apart from the bowl as womb (woman) I noticed the virginal white was being covered in a wave of approaching womanhood red. The mother’s red was being covered with the black of the crone, and the darkness of old age was being covered by the whiteness of the maiden’s next generation. It was almost as though I was looking at waves of colour telling the story of generations washing up over the symbols of womanhood (Lewis 2000).

Another comment about the same work referred to it as

…different, eye-catching and reminiscent of a wedding feast (Kath 2000).
The context of celebration, of being woman together with other women, is clearly being experienced and expressed by a woman who visited the 2001 exhibition, *re-fabricating our lives*, who saw the quilts as

...describing the diversity of women’s lives in such a variety of techniques, colours and styles. It facilitates expressions of our desires, dreams and ideas in a manner that feels comfortable for me as a multifaceted woman.

On another occasion, thea (2002) was clear about the connections made through the women artists giving expression to their values and beliefs, hopes and dreams:

...it’s actually like I can almost feel that’s a woman there (pointing to the art work), and that’s a woman there. I feel woman.

On the other hand, part of this celebration of women’s multiplicity is the recognition of an often commonly shared pathos that challenges the inevitability of day-to-day realities. The works by Sue Dennis (in #2 and 3) on the challenges of women’s domestic situations were related to by a visitor to the 2000 exhibition as ‘...really whimsical, even amusing despite its very heavy topic’. In spirit it reiterates the earlier comment by Mary about women’s capacity to live and work both beyond and within artificially contrived boundaries.

**Difference as interrelatedness**

Recognising the beautiful and rich diversity of the quilts is a constant element in viewers’ responses, giving recognition both to the diversity and to the power to challenge established traditions in ways that are relational and individual was an important message received by visitors to the exhibitions.

Beautiful diversity! (Judy)

A celebration of cultures… and of every single woman, every single one.

(Helen Mary)

A visitor who was a quilter was able to articulate how the quilt form itself has this capacity, curiously and accurately describing patchwork as ‘...repetition and variety’. She also proclaimed the postmodern influence and cross-cultural inferences in the quilt by Louise Duvernet (#2), and its ‘...intriguing mix of different cultures and styles’, which she identified as having Celtic, Japanese,
and Moorish or Middle Eastern influence. The little quilt even led her on a metaphorical and mythical journey to Scandinavian countries as she wove together the threads of connection the images re-created for her. She admired the courage to put such diverse fabrics together, and the use of imagery in the fabrics that tantalise (yet satisfy) by the use of seemingly incongruent elements.

Delight in diversity and an appreciation of shared views and experiences often go hand-in-hand, shown as a mutual resonance, sometimes obvious, and other times less so. A visitor recorded her impression of the *re-fabricating our indigenous spirit* (2002) through a response to the works that she described as ‘contemplative’.

...personal history created and recreated from myths and memories...they are wonderful snapshots of how women have been influenced so differently and diversely. (Anne 2002)

The ‘diversity of experience and many layers of self’ was described by another visitor as ‘a feast’, and this sense of inclusion, of being in relationship with Other deriving from an enriching diversity of expression and experience was evident in many of the interviews. It is a sensation of ‘relational reality’ that stands as an alternative to the autonomous and independent (male) adult to the exclusion of others as required and enforced by Western culture for a healthy self-identity (Sewell 1999, p.247). An alternative perception requires a ‘receptive stance’ to the co-evolution of self in relation to Other by perceiving the patterns by which we relate and creating an imaginal space for shared visions. Such a perception denies the belief in absolutist realities that serve as a filter for perceptions that recognise the flexible and changing by embracing and including the other (Sewell 1999).

**Connecting to self in place**

Many of the viewers responded to specific quilts, relating the way that they evoked memories of places of origin, points of departure, reconnections and reconstructions over time and space. An experience of place includes ‘...memories, attitudes, dreams, emotions, cultural stories, personality
characteristics, needs and motives, all of which carry with them the influences of a particular time in history and one’s particular socio-economic position in society. No place is a “place’ until things that have happened in it are remembered as being important to our cultural life’ (Russell in Cameron (ed.) 2003, p.155). The becoming of self is in inverse relationship with the extent that we care for the world we occupy and act within. Sewell writes of the perspective that gives vision to a sense of self in relation to other:

…we are what we care for. Self, care, attention, and the world are an integrated, singular self-organising system, inseparable (1999, p.267). Standing in front of a piece of art brings together the plurality and complexity of these sensations and with it the opening for a new perception, an act of imaginal/magical perception.

Feelings of connection to landscape in general and in relation to particular places were aroused in the responders. In experiencing our embeddedness in the natural cycles of life through the artists’ creations of it, the senses are brought to life not only through colour, texture and form, but also through our sense of participating in its creation through the act of viewing. For Heather the checked fabrics in Alvina Hall’s (#4) The Farina Series encouraged ‘meandering memories… successfully evoked feelings of childhood’. Another viewer related to the four small pieces in immediate recognition of ‘the very bleached, huge blue sky, bleached earth… very much the environment around where I live’ (Helen Mary, 2002). Though seemingly disparate in time, there is a connection between these two observations, a sense of embeddedness, an

…and identification with our connectedness, and also recognition of our being a small part of a larger grouping; enables us to speak from our particular roles, groups and places, and also to contribute to them and feel that we belong; sense of our lineage and place within it; deepens our evolving sense of meaning, and of the wonder of life (Hill in Cameron (ed.) 2003, p.188).

In comments about the same exhibition, Heather relates how Jan Clark’s (#4) representation of a bush fire brought up ‘the duality of feelings’ that being involved in such an experience evokes:
...the beauty and power of the fire, its cleansing all-embracing potential; and the fear and dread and pain...all were conjured for me by this piece with its remarkably adventurous combinations of fabric colours, texture, dyes.

Though Heather referred to the ‘duality’ of her feelings, there seems no sense of any oppositional contradiction in her having these responses on viewing the art works. On the contrary, as Sewell points out, through the process we are enabled to recognise ‘our wholeness, including our sensory and sensuous selves, only through perceiving the Other’, whether this be another person or the environment, and creates an ethical way of being that is ‘born of self-love and enlightened self-interest’ (1999, p. 262) From and spiritual perspective, it is an act giving meaning to the deepest understanding of integrity, in the recognition of self as agent in co-creation in the becoming of self.

Helen Mary speaks of relationship with place across time and as the set of complex psychological phenomena.

Each quilt is a journey, calling up the country. Each one carries within it a driving force that is something about the emergence of hidden countries...sewing up the country, the hidden territory in each one of us, a way of bringing our relationship with the past, present and future into a meaningful relationship for today. Like stitches, these hidden experiences rise and go down, rising and falling...looking at the hidden aspects. ...the stitches are like tracks, actually physically into the landscape (Helen Mary 2002).

There is a sense that Helen Mary shares the journey, recognises the tracks. She adds that she sees the quilts as the ‘soul weavings’ of the women, which has her questioning how she would ‘weave up’ such visions for herself. There is no sense of competition in this, simply awe for what she is witnessing as she receives the message of each quilt. It is clear that Helen Mary is having a conversation with the art works, letting their stories resonate on a deep, inaudible level, voiced through trance-like utterances. She takes the relational position as an embodied resonance of recognition in ‘(S)imultaneously recognising similarities in (one) another’s experiences, thereby experiencing connectedness, communion and a sense of ‘we’; (as) finding oneself in ‘the other”(Hill in Cameron (ed.), 2003, p. 188).
Ideas that indicate a sense of self emerging from a connection to land and place were expressed, providing a different focus on origins. From the framework of a modernist material discourse a sense of identification as being in place is primarily associated with ownership through division, boundaries and exclusive. From the postmodern or post-colonial frame, the question to ask might be: what might it mean to consider self identifying with place by visualizing practices that are less divisive, such as occur through insistent, often misplaced and irrelevant religious and cultural customs; through being less influenced by linguistic and racial differences? In one of my conversations with thea, her thoughts turned to a personally evolving connection with her place/land as a growing awareness of an indigenous relationship that was ever-deepening. She spoke of the process of coming close to her ‘indigenous consciousness/mind’ as ‘multifarious’, where the art works in the exhibition (#4) were enabling a deeper understanding of her personal process through ‘having a sense of creating some sense of belonging, …creating some story of belonging’, which does not diminish her sense of connection to the many places in which she has lived; she has many stories.

Like others interviewed, thea’s connection to land derives from a sense of the sacred. Thea suggests that we can connect with land and sense of belonging to place from the perception of being in a nomadic relationship, which is about creating each place as sacred, ‘… where my originality can blossom in a different way in a different environment… and being responsible for putting the pieces together in our lives.’ Looking carefully at Dianne Jones’ Transformation Garment (#4) made from so many different fabrics and colours, she found significant correlation between her thoughts about ‘being our original selves… in the eyes of the Earth, learning from Earth as children learn from their mother’. In our conversation about the 2002 exhibition, as we went through the gallery rooms it became clear that for thea each work elicited and offered insights into ways we could perceive ourselves in auto-chthonic and indigenous interaction with Earth and coming to know a connection to All-that-is-other. She recognised the quilts as calling for ‘a celebration of difference… for people and creatures of the earth
other than human.’ One particular exhibit, the doormat of Cheryl Moodai Robinson (#4) encrusted with the bones of native animals she had collected after road-kill, resonated with thea’s understanding of itinerant and long-standing connections with lands and places. ‘It shows how relics can instantly bring back memories and understandings about what has happened in our life.’

The movement between internal and external ‘landscapes’ through the interaction between vision and imagination has been shown by the responses from visitors, acting to draw focus to and possibly shift one’s horizon of perception of self and other. The horizon as an archetype seen to be all around us ‘constellates and mimes our relationship with it… shifting its visible relationship with us with every step we take’ so that through a reciprocal and seamless process of co-creation, what is seen and heard continually updates and informs the imagination. Such is the meta[ph]ormic horizon presented by art; as we metaphorically stand within the visual ‘landscape’ of the art work we interact within the horizon that surrounds us, and with each new place we stand the future shifts. Ilya, as a migrant to Australia from Estonia, talks about different senses of connection to land and place, and her sense of the ‘indigenous spirit’. Her perceptions contain strong sentiments of a connection to places that inform her reality, finding connection with her resident place of being through recognising the polarities that are inherent to a sense of the self displaced, of belonging to multiple places and of retaining her connections through her spirituality.

So in my meditations I have this idea of polarities. Going the other side of the world, but having a connection. I find it very supportive to think of my ancestral spirits …just as is this (pointing to the quilt The Coincidence of Opposites,) though not exactly in the same configuration.

**Spirit as connecting to Source**

A number of different people who saw the four exhibitions commented on a deep sense of spiritual consciousness aroused by seeing the works. A woman who visited the 2001 exhibition felt the works ‘very easy to relate to on a spiritual level’, which she later clarified as a spirituality of ‘connection to Earth that links
back to the so-called primitive and being in harmony with the universal flow.’ Her comments were noted following our informal conversation in the gallery. She made a clear distinction between religion and spirituality, the former ‘doesn’t create, but stifles spirituality’, and institutionalises its expression ‘for the purpose of maintaining power’. Her main association, elicited by all of the works of the women artists was their connection with ‘almost primal instincts in relation to Earth and earth Goddess in the Gaia sense.’ I noted that Susan wondered what men would come up with being in touch with such a sense and using the same medium. She said that she felt ‘an intimate connection with all the women’.

Susan spoke of the experience of being with the artists and their works as though it were revelatory, in a deeply spiritual and personal way, and was clear the imagery in the exhibition elicited these thoughts. Relating to the works on ‘an intuitive level allows us to be in touch with the inner voice …and be in touch with the way we want to be as self in the world.’ Susan referred to the installation by the four artists, *It’s just what we do*, (#3) as ‘uterine, with its homely connections; it tells us where we come from as humans: from stones, earth, through animals, to where we are now …with the plastic peg at the top representing the recent phenomenon of technology.’ She compared the work to ‘a poem … the more you look, the more comes out.’

**Looking within and around the frame**

Suzi Gablik considers the role of imagination in developing consciousness when she refers to art as a medium by which ‘to find ways of effecting a release of archetypal memory that predates the loss of our integration with nature’.

The particular structure of modern consciousness, centred in a rationalising, abstracting and controlling ego determines the world we live in and how we perceive and understand it; without the magical sense of perception, we do not live in a magical world. We no longer have the ability to shift mind-sets, and thus perceive other realities - to move between the worlds as ancient shamans did (1998, pp. 42-43).
As suggested in previous chapters, Judy Grahn’s storying of menstrual blood as medium and initial source for a developing awareness through differentiation provides a rich story from which women may access a sense of a personal and communal inter-subjectivity that provides the space to see imagination and creativity as sacred acts in co-creation with all that is. Imagination is entwined physically, with our emotions and feelings, and conveys and interprets perceptions of the world we see and live in. It is inextricably bound up with embodied experience and perceptions, and exhibits as a sense of well-being, identity, and a sense of place. In an article discussing a psychological perspective on place, eco-psychologist David Russell (in Cameron (ed.) 2003, p.155) writes: ‘It is not surprising then that the imagination is the primary source of this engagement (with place) and that the language of the imagination (poetry, metaphor, imagery, wordplay best allows us to dwell meaningfully in this place.’ Many years earlier, Starhawk (1989, p.122) had pointed to the power of the imagination tracing an etymological wordplay: ‘... the image is the heart of magic which is made by imagination... - from the image all is born... through what we imagine, we know.’ Seen and embodied from this perspective, imagination has the capacity to work the ‘magic’ necessary to alter our perceptions of self, other and place.

**Imagining co-creational worldviews**

As has been suggested, projected through a traditional spiritual and cultural Hellenic-Judaeo-Christian lens, perspective directs perceptions and worldviews to an invisible, intangible vanishing point on the horizon, a point that may be interpreted as totalising, reductive and essentialist, claiming access to an ultimate truth whilst it remains unaccessible and unattainable. This construct has been culturally supported by the position of pre-eminence and privilege afforded the notion of male genius in Western cultural discourse - in its purest form through the word as text (‘In the beginning was the Word’). In assigning the true site of reading and interpretation to the reader/viewer, the intention is to reverse perspectives, to retain a sense of the mystery of creation/creativity in which all
can be engaged, and to have a sense of it as immanent to our lives. This phenomenon is ‘counter-theological’ and ‘properly revolutionary’, since ‘to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science and law’ (Barthes 1977, p.54). In refusing to be myopic by overlooking the gaps, it is possible to recognise and become familiar with the imaginings and realities that are the full quotient of the context that we, as Creators, bring to the act of viewing. So much more does the context of the viewer enrich the perspective and perception offered by the artist through her artwork.

In her chapter titled *Looking for a worldview*, Laura Sewell is quite literally punning on the word ‘looking’: we are what we see, such that the more important question to consider in relation to an authentic sense of self-identity is ‘where am I?’ rather than ‘who am I?’ (1999, p. 257)50 Looking is a process that, as Sewell describes it, ‘patterns up’ our brains, and our further capacity to perceive. As an iterative process that inheres in organic systems, it is co-creative. The saving grace, if I can put it that way, is that the perceived world ‘is woven together by the strength of the human imagination.’

Imagination is a mental art and a primary function of consciousness. Imagination opens the doors to the invisible realm, revealing the yet unseen strand between ourselves and the focus of our gaze. Unlike common forms of projection (endogenous perception), in which our worldview unconsciously and greatly influences perception, imagination weaves human consciousness into the world and may intentionally co-create the world we see and act upon. And with true reciprocity within a relational system, the imagination further evolves with the world it perceives (Sewell 1999, p. 258).

**Sacralising art**

The creation of an image has always been held by recorded religions to be a sacred act, an icon embodying the sacred brought about through the act of

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50 Sewell makes reference to these questions in the context of the Dineh people of North America, and their deep familiarity with the cardinal directions as they traditionally inform a sense of self, embodied in place. This too is the way we are using them in our ritual circles: not just to resonate with our psycho-spiritual selves through metaphor, but to transform our sense of self in relation to our place on the globe, as reminders or a personal and collective relational existence with landscape.
creation in separation that makes the image itself ‘tapu’, or tabboo (a word adopted from Polynesian peoples, meaning both ‘sacred’ and ‘menstruation’ (Grahn1993, p. 5). In tandem with this theme and point of view, this thesis proposes that through creating from the imagination set in a context, we recover a sense of ‘self in the act of creation’, or to use another expression, we are able to reinstate a sense of the (inter-)subjective self living in co-ordination with the ongoing creation of the universe on multiple levels. I am suggesting that this perspective entrains a spiritual theory and practice that can be expressed not only conceptually, but evokes a deeply embodied response-ability to oneself and other as inter-changeable and as mutually reciprocal in a process of co-creating self, other and image. It is a perspective that includes and retains the gap, sees the space, steps into it and remains open to what fills the framework and has given the creation its assignation. It is a process of self-becoming in deep reciprocal relationship to Self as Other as Earth.

As society becomes more consistently exposed to visuals as text, we are also becoming aware that not only do visual images express all manner and subtlety of perceptions, the melding of factors that have generally been classified as distinct and separate forms of knowledge, the imaginary and real, is becoming acknowledged. I have been suggesting that such a separation has not always been so, and the imaginary has been understood to take form through the way we language what is perceived as the real. Both in creating and in viewing artworks, there is a birth – and also a death. Perceptions are changed and reformed, in the way that patches of fabric are re-arranged in the course of deciding on the final design of a block or the arrangement of blocks to create the desired effect for the final imaging. In viewing a piece of art, the viewer becomes co-creator in deciding how the creation will speak to her/him, by responding to the story s/he hears or sees. Or to put it another way: rather than simply being acted upon as an individual through the contemporary mechanistic mindset, there is a shift in our focus of attention to that which is relational and reciprocal, a
mindset that recognises the interdependent self, self and other in mutual creation.\textsuperscript{51}

**Artists and art works as agents of change**

Interaction with an artwork can be experienced as a result of many factors, often very particular and personal. Sensing participation in the creative process requires a sense of vision and openness to the process of seeing that is other than that which is discursively formed. Christa Sanders, is an artist who exhibited in all but the first of the *re-fabricating* exhibitions and wrote of her ‘art experience’ in visiting galleries thus:

> I go hot and cold wandering through an Art Gallery, still being engaged with everything regardless what category it belongs to. One or two pieces will hit my core. This tiny speck I am in the universe, I suddenly connect, communicate with somebody else’s truth. I can’t tell you how much that means to me (Ozquilt Network Newsletter 2004, no.53, p.9).

This inquiry is situated in a variety of perceptions about the nature of consciousness and change. Grahn and Sewell, among others, encourage a consciousness that develops a relational experience with local environments, which in turn influences worldviews (1989, 1999). This position suggests a belief system influenced by the capacity available to experience reality from a position of at-one-ment with the environment. The artist responds to the environment in which s/he lives by being perceptive, imaginarily knowing that which s/he wants to represent visibly in the world. When we view the art works we open discussion between the multiple perceptions that form the individual self, living within the wider community. I suggest that, be it a local or a transported ‘indigenous consciousness’, there is no single method, body of knowledge or an epistemological schemata that is capable of defining or discerning ultimate,

\textsuperscript{51} Though it is not the purpose of the present project to detail research in the functioning of neurological visual science, much of Sewell’s work is based in her work in this area. She reports the findings with regard to ‘absolute-threshold experiments’ (being the threshold between seeing and not-seeing) as ‘ambiguous’. In her experience ‘(W)ithin that liminal zone, imagination, intuition, and several photon-waves of light on the very edge of seeing were indistinguishable from one another.’ Through the act of seeing, it is clear that we have the capacity to co-create in cyclic process, which is very dependent on what we see.
evaluative answers or definitions on these matters. Multiple discernments and adaptations are available and accessible within a dialectic that is in process, happening in dialogue with self, between self in relation to other and environment. The artists’ works exhibited in the four re-fabricating exhibitions expressed a plurality of responses to the themes, and visitors reflected this even further.

In the production of the four exhibitions, through the stages of inception, developing and promoting, to exhibiting and taking down and reflecting, I have had a sense that there has been an experience of magic for all involved – artists, viewers and myself as curator. It has involved the continual weaving together of several continuous threads that bring together the various aspects of the research project. The exhibitions provided an opportunity for conscious perceptions/visions, for re-visioning and en-visioning. Each revolution of the exhibitions moved me into a deepening awareness of the interrelationships that could be considered to be integral to a spirituality and ontology.

The artworks themselves embody this realization and understanding when as viewers we step into the space they provide by their own embeddedness in the process of representing and re-creating. They embody a perspective that is inclusive, interconnected, inter-related and non-heirarchical. Viewed from this framework, they can be seen to express an immanent understanding and sensation of ourselves as embodied and embedded in the natural environment and offer the space for renewing visions for world in which the structures of relationships may be seen from a different perspective – as non-heriarchical and interrelated, interconnected and reciprocal. Both works and viewers can be seen as agents of change, offering a biophilic imaginary that directs human endeavours and actions towards a perception of the life-death cycle, and perhaps supporting ideas of community that develop structures to create equality and justice, and the associated conditions for an ethos of ‘flourishing natality’ (Jantzen 1998).
The experiences described by the visitors’ responses demonstrate a sense of a spirituality that is embedded in the natural cycles, embodied and relational. They also describe an orientation that relies on personal authority and recognises the ontology as a process of becoming. A consciousness of this process as immanent, that we exist in co-creation with all that is, is evident in their recognising a deepening and altering of perception and percept-ability in relation to what they see and visualize. The experience of spirituality is one in which authority is mediated by an inner [g]nowing, and a sense of personal, creative involvement in the greater Creation and indeed of divinity – or what I have called throughout the inquiry, the Mystery. Ideological abstractions are nowhere to be heard, and perceptions of the sacred and sacralising acts are grounded and embodied, situated in the practicalities of everyday life.

The creative works of the artists are the visible representation of a re-birth being projected into our lives. Perhaps an apt analogy could be that they are seen as though by means of the pinpoint hole that allows images into the camera obscura (meaning ‘darkened room’), the gallery being that darkened room. It appeals to my symbolist mind that images made visible through such a pinhole camera are inverted and very dim, just as the strength of the sun’s rays have been diminished on the shortest day, and shadows extend to their full length. When using camera obscura, as apparently many artists of the Renaissance era did to reproduce likenesses, originally blocking out all light except what was permitted through a small aperture onto a blank wall (Hockney 2002), the object most clearly visible is the sun herself, an obvious reminder of Earth’s seasonal relationship for birth, growth, death, decay and renewal through the interdependence of dark and light that is the metamorphic process of our embeddedness in the cycle of creation through destruction. And it reminds us that it is through Earth’s revolution, renewal and growth is inevitable and begins again for the regeneration of the planet. This ‘pinprick of light’ represented by the art works in the gallery situation has the potential to awaken us to the reality of
dreamings that remind us of the inescapable and inexorable visions that are formed in the darkness of imagining.
Carry with you the cargo of the past until you reach the hinge of the spiral where death and life are one, where what has been consumed can be renewed, and All Possibility is quickened to new life by what has been. The cycle ends and begins again, and the Wheel of the Year turns, on and on. (Starhawk 1989:218)
Yesterday Jennifer told me a story that reflects the way that I see my creative work in quilts. She had a copy of my book that records the earlier series of quilts, *Seasons of the Soul, the Wheel of the Year in Quilts* on her library shelves. She had recently moved to another house, and wanted to have a ‘clearing’ ritual. The woman doing the clearing took the book off the shelf and read the Self Blessing at the end on page 105. Never having seen my work before, she looked at the images of the quilts and remarked that they were sacred geometry. Although many other people have commented on the spiritual element of my work, from my perception of my own creative processes none have been quite so accurate in their expression as this person, who saw not only the final form, but also the accompanying process of its creation that is inextricably linked to its reading (Journal entry).

**Going full circle**

During the course of the research project I worked on re-creating, both in psyche and form, another turn on the Wheel through the quilts that I made, one that would bring me full circle, home to the land of my birth in the Southern Hemisphere. In doing so I re-cycled renditions of ancient stories and understandings and re-visioned their manifestation for present and future, by visually celebrating a renewed relationship to Earth for myself, for those of us who live in the Southern Hemisphere and perhaps for others. I recognised the quilts created during this time as both process (metaphor for) and outcome (metaform) of the research, and I felt that during the time of their creation I was engaged with the sacred in meta[ph]ormic process. With each creation I became more involved in the stages of creation through destruction and resurrection, and was aware of their correspondence to my own psyche and life situations. I started to pay closer attention to what was happening in the land and bush around me during each of the seasons. Early in the research I make note of the ‘white bridal veils draping the undergrowth in the bush’ at the season of Imbolc, ‘heralding the return of virginal light.’ And the vivid colours that were the

52 In a similar way to Judy Grahn’s analogy of menstruation as initiating consciousness, Brian Swimme envisions an ontogeny that recapitulates the evolutionary development of the entire past in which early humans were ‘in the space’ to experience the universal and self-forming sequence of communion, differentiation and autopoesis (1997, p. 8). This chapter has the intention of providing a space, using personal examples of what may be a similar process as I have experienced it bringing quilts into form.
new-growth tips of gum leaves, and when they seemed to be particularly abundant – in spring and its fullness, at Beltane. That even though there seemed to be types of what we call wattle around at any time of the year, the abundance of variety, colour and form changes over the seasons, but is particularly present to view from the time of the winter solstice and on into the Easter’s blooms. Indeed the gentle and delicate wattles seem to bring the light with them. In the fullness of the summer at Litha, as the indescribable blues of the jacarandas in bloom meet the blue of the Australian sky, I watch the stately angophoras shed their golden bark skins.

The inceptions of quilts that emerged were sparked by multifarious inspirations and intentions. They are the patterns forming from patterns that continue to emerge and grow in complexity from an ever-unfolding perception of self, identified in relationship to other and to the area in which I live. The weaving of these multifarious influences from nature and growing perceptions of the patterns gave rise to questions of design, often addressed and solved from the perspective of symbology and story rather than referring to the usual learnt conventions of design, composition or colour. The interweaving of mythic story, symbolism and simple geometric shapes such as roughly cut equilateral triangles, which to me symbolise the life-giving power of woman’s pubic triangle, has often formed the basis for the development of a whole work. This interweaving of inspirations and what is available is the dynamic movement between darkness and light, modelled by the movement of the Wheel of the Year, in its constancy and change. In reflecting on this process, I see it as a celebration of the dynamics of interconnectedness and interdependence recognised in the interrelationships of similarity in difference, of familiarity in diversity, and the continuous and harmonious flow between them, as between darkness and light, in the creative process.

Through reference to my journal notes, I have outlined some of the life influences and perceptions relating to the works created during the period of the research
(1999 – 2004), by pointing to the experience of the creative process on the Wheel of the Year as I came to identify it in the process of making of the quilts. The telling unfolds a personal creative dynamic that is told through story (metaphor) and shown as image (metaform) at the end of the chapter. The chapter concludes with a personal narrative, written in relation to what I experienced in the creative process as the ever-present meeting of self with other, as I experienced it on one occasion in the bush below my house, through the very ancient Goddess icon of Medusa (see pp. 277 – 80).

**My met[ph]ormic art praxis**

The considerations below are formed from observations about the creation process as it relates to my own experience noted in journals, and sketches recorded in artist diaries made during the research period. Sometimes the reflections on one particular piece of work stretched over extended periods of time. As a summary compilation of events, feelings and observations noted during the conception, construction and design of the quilts in the process of their creation, the stories that follow are not necessarily in chronological sequence. Rather they aim to trace lines of connection and overlaps between quilts that show the operation of the creative process according to that which I have identified as the creative cycle of the Wheel of the Year. Recordings from the journals are evident by inclusion using quotation marks and the present tense is used with the intention of eliciting a sense of the immanence of the reflections as they occurred, and the past tense being used to indicate later reflections. The questions interspersed as personal musings throughout this explorative analysis, which originated in response to the journal notes, are identifiable by the use of italics. These questions may then have then been extended as I encountered the need to further explore the underlying focus of the inquiry, as I continued to expand and develop my understanding of an auto-chthonic feminist aesthetic of creativity and spiritual consciousness that was emerging and unfolding through my personal experience of the creative process.
Though it was initially thought that I would be creating a new banner for each of
the seasons, at Mabon 2000 it is noted that ‘I don’t feel the energy of what I had
been doing – the old ideas are needing to fall away, perhaps even the Wheel
quilts, and wait for the energy of new form manifesting.’ The creative experience
referred to became more like a ‘sensing’, an attentiveness that was more even
than an embodied ‘awareness’. In my journal, I note a sense of the changing
energies in recording how, at the season of Lammas, ‘there is a turning away
from the fullness of Earth’s manifestation of Goddess as mother, and that while
there is a sense of well-being and abundance, there is not much energy to start
into quilt-making.’ I am ‘distracted’ by the appreciation for the abundance in my
life at the moment and ‘want to sit back and enjoy.’

As suggested earlier, this chapter makes use of five years of recording my
reflections of the creative process through the observation of the seasonal cycles
as external and internal processes interacting. The quilts created are represented
visually at the end of this chapter (pp.285 – 94, and in Appendices #5). In the
discussion that follows, not all the quilts are mentioned, and they have been
grouped differently in order to represent the transition through the seasonal
cycle. Though not all of the quilts were directly associated with a specific season,
as I became more familiar with the revelations offered by that season and the
quilts themselves, I found that some were quite ‘flexible’ in their capacity for
association. They are presented here in relation to the Wheel of the Year for the
sake of coherence in representing the creative process as observed on the
seasonal cycle (rather than the full cycle that is involved in the creation of each
individual quilt). Presented in this way, they elucidate a particular aspect of the
seasonal cycle as it might relate to the conceptual theme of each quilt.

The creative process is experienced at any time of the year, and can be
experienced in the matter of a few hours. Observing, experiencing in my daily
rounds the movement through the periods of the annual cycle and their subtle
changes from year to year in the bigger picture, enlivened my understanding of
what were perhaps ancient ways of seeing and being in the world that are just as accessible and relevant for us today – by developing and practising a reversible embodied perspective experienced in place. My custom of ritually hanging the quilts for each season in my home also facilitated this turn around in perception. As I continued to observe and be alerted to the subtleties of the seasonal changes, it became clear to me that the diagrammatic representation of the Wheel of the Year is at best just that: a schematic diagram, which because of its very form, may contribute to making perceptions rigid and lessening capacity to experience other subtleties of the natural world. Although a signpost is a helpful guide to finding one’s way, the experience of the journey tells us more about a place, and the reflection I engaged in continued to provide new insights for embodied understanding.

**Lammas to Mabon**

An early journal note recorded my thoughts about a developing understanding of an indigenous consciousness, the recovery of which through the ancient European indigenous spirituality associated with the Wheel of the Year was suggested in the original research proposal. ‘What do I mean by it?’ In considering a response given in conversation to an acquaintance about my spiritual beliefs, I realise that ‘beliefs’ is another word that I am finding difficulty to make sense of, sounding as it does, so static and unchanging. Even the notion of what was called a ‘spiritual quest’ as ‘seeking inner peace’ seems strange, as though preparing for the finality of some sort of knowing, which I realise for me is embedded in the process, the experience and continual reflection on it. The underlying question for this idea of indigenous consciousness becomes: *how to ‘attain’ (or more specifically attend to) a consciousness of the Mystery in constant process of revelation – the Mystery of Creation with which I engage daily?*

My attention to quilt-making returns as I am reminded by drawing a particular rune that creativity is shape-shifting, using energy to take a purposeful new form – to create change. I note that the season of Lammas is impending, and I am
responding to the invitation of the rune to ‘be’ new forms manifesting, to be ‘flesh of my flesh’ so that ‘the world may perceive itself through me... as the reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible’. The paradox of the Mystery is that we have never been able to separate the perceivable world from the perceiving self, that they implicitly affirm the existence of the other affirms my experience that we are quite literally affirming the existence of the other in mutual reciprocity, as subject and object. Such a view gives rise to ‘embodied minds’ having the creative freedom to respond to and change the world.\(^5\) Into the process, I remember that shamans know that

...to change shape you must become one with the form you would take on.
I am feeling the abundance of the harvest, as well as the immanence of its loss... recognising the pain of separation and dissolution that is an inevitable part of the creative process.

(Mabon 2000)

I turn back to an old concept for a quilt. It is the image of a rose over a setting sun that returns, ‘with a real sense of the fire energy to create a midsummer quilt before the season totally passes...I feel the energy of sun power, waning though it is.’ As a starting point, I have looked at an old drawing, done years earlier and the image of a banner comes up. I have taken out fabrics that attract me by their colours – oranges, bright reds, luminous pinks, and questions form: what are these fabrics saying to me, and how do I listen? Is the listening to be heard in the observation of the seasonal cycles, often registered in my own mini-cycles of psycho-spirit? Where does the speaking come from? Does this interaction between the ‘speaking’ fabric and my ‘listening’ become embedded in the visual form through my choice and placement of fabric, that then becomes design and technique? In the same entry I make note of communicative and receptive energies and their shift from the speaking and hearing of earlier oral traditions that have been almost wholly replaced by the written text, thereby curtailing a capacity to be embedded in a deep experience of ourselves as one with the natural world. At the time I was reading David Malouf’s novella, An Imaginary

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\(^{5}\) Theses reflections developed in relation to the phenomenological theory of Merleau-Ponty for whom Flesh was ‘the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent’ (Abram 1997, pp. 66-68), and the perspective of process theology developed by Carol Christ (2003, pp. 63-8).
Life, which brings home this change in perspective by positioning the reader at the turning point where the power of the written language (in this case Latin) loses its significance and value for the Roman poet Ovid, who finds a deeper sense of himself in hearing the ‘language’ of the wilderness that surrounds him, which he (albeit unwillingly) inhabits. It seems strange to involve auditory sensibilities in the creation of a visual outcome, but I note that ‘perhaps I am re-learning the art of listening and hearing.’

The inspiration for quilts comes and goes in cycles that are minuscule, just fleeting insights, and only a tiny portion come to fullness; some are started and remain unfinished, stashed away in the dark to await renewal. This was the case with the rose quilt (Season of the Rose). The idea seeded and then was put to one side for some time. I note at times a ‘fear of the dissolution of the Virgin energy and the assurance that life and creativity will continue’. Other quilts are created in stages, seemingly completed then calling for a re-turn on the Wheel of Creation. They are worked on again so that their desire might shape-shift, as was the case with Beltane Fires, which shape-shifted three times before finding its full manifestation. Often long periods of time elapse between the inception and final manifestation, spaces in which the seasons change and my inner cycles manifest different experiences to be explored and possibly included.

In another entry it is noted that the quilts themselves are demanding this space in order to ‘define their form’ so that ‘they themselves become the spaces in which the speaking and listening can occur’. I wonder: is this what happened in the interviews, with the quilts in the gallery as the ‘shamans’, the ‘media’ effecting con-versations that changed perceptions? Were they providing the space for ‘proprioception’, where we can feel language slipping into the background, as another that may even be unable to be enunciated steps in? I’ve often noted that in the process of creating a quilt, it ‘takes on a life of its own’, seemingly

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54 Abram suggests that for oral peoples there is a discourse of ‘synaesthetic engagement with land’ in which ‘auditory attention may be joined with the visual focus in order to enter into a living relation with the expressive character of things’ (1997, p.130).
becoming quite independent of its creator, perhaps in its eagerness to move into another cycle of creation – that with the viewer.

The question of when to stop during the creative process, of when the quilt is ready to have its own independent existence is very familiar. *Where does a creation find its beginning, and how decide its end?* How does it emerge from the darkness of not-form into manifestation? As I hang the quilt for Mabon made in 1996 for the first round on the Wheel of the Year, I wonder when the quilt for the next round of this season will come into view. The seeds have floated by on the breeze, and none have taken root. I try not to be concerned, knowing that seeds only gestate in favourable conditions, namely in the dark. I note that ‘perhaps living in rhythm with the seasons is bringing a new wisdom and patience to my creative process.’

In this season leading into the dark half of the year, and following the emigration of a close creator friend to New Zealand, I am feeling un-creative and in need of solace from Goddess Kali, She whom I have come to know as ‘the compassionate one’. Without her almost daily encouragement, I notice the love of self that is the Virgin energy is also fading, as ‘the friendships and intimacy of sharing the harvesting months gives way to a new form of intimacy with self – of walking hand-in-hand into the dark space of trusting my own creative powers – into the void.’ All my creative ventures, including the research project, seem to be in ‘immanent danger of dissolution.’ But, staying with the ‘feeling’, I note the ‘need to stay with the energy of closing down into the dark…learning to accept it in all its power.’

As the Goddess image that I have come to know as the Destroyer, I am able to see compassion in her recognition of the inevitability of dissolution for the creative cycle, and the calling forth of a different love of self than that which is available to us in the season of abundance. ‘I am the compassionate one’ I recall, and thus addressing myself, realise that reciprocity is not about losing
oneself in the other – that the creative process involves a great integrity towards one’s self. Where does one’s ‘self’ stop and the other begin? Is not the notion of ‘losing’ oneself at the core of great religious experiences? I note the loss through being a mother of an aspect of what is called ‘self’, but that in the ‘losing’ there has been a ‘finding’: that of my self as creatively interactive. This interaction too is surely inherent in the process of creating a textile piece, as in the ebb and flow of the abundance and shortage of the seasons, and in the energies of independent vitality, giving nurture, and showing wisdom that are the phases of women’s lives, each containing within the seeds of the others.

Having been asked by my emigrant friend to submit a small piece for a travelling ‘suitcase’ exhibition with the title Horizons, the considerations start to collect like seeds being blown in on the wind. The theme is particularly pertinent to my exploration of an indigenous sense of consciousness of the time-space continuum, which I have understood as a fully embodied, visual perception of land held in place by the ever-moving horizon. There is no metaphysical concept of time for oral peoples, time being cyclical. It does not readily distinguish itself from a spatial field because they are experientially immersed in it, and therefore what we call space is perhaps better named ‘place’ (Abram 1997, Sewell 1999). Unlike the abstraction of an infinite and homogenous space, place is from the beginning a ‘qualitative matrix, a pulsing potentised field of experience, able to move us even in its stillness’ (Abrams 1997, p. 191) How do we move into and live in the experience of time-space continuum? In my journal I have noted considerations with reference to Abram’s discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas about perception, that an artwork has the capacity to extend beyond what we usually perceive as spatial phenomena and to embrace the viewer in a world…at the horizon, where they see embodied, animate and emergent processes…where space itself is in a dynamic, continuous unfolding…that collapses our familiar notion of time as one dimensional and space as three-dimensional into an interactive pattern, a partnership between past, present and future.

(Samhain 2000)
I am enthralled by the seeds of thought planted by the last phrase of the text (later translated into the quilt’s title), and challenged by the way to express these concepts in a quilt little bigger than an A3 sheet of paper. Perhaps, I also note, on the scale of bringing myself physically, emotionally and spiritually into the Southern Hemisphere raises similar considerations: *what to keep, what to throw out?* As I wonder about the relevance of these questions to an indigenous consciousness, I elicit the realm of unknown memory to visualise the ancient landscape that is the horizon of my current home, the Blue Mountains. Sorting through hand-dyed fabrics for colours, I wonder: *How do we choose, make decisions in the creative process, and what are the effects of the choice?* ‘The creation process is slippery,’ I write, ‘as slippery as the research project, and as multiple as the grains of sand that give shape to the escarpments – and the multiple horizons of time within them.’ It is certain that I will not need much actual material, but enormous insightfulness about what to use in order to create the depth of field, both visually and in the imagination – ‘a scary thought!’ I note the sensation that ‘time-space is standing still, and there is a meeting with the ancestors, and those who have yet to arrive, both physically and in psyche’.

While reading that Abram noted that the notion of the curvature of time-space is extremely difficult to articulate on the page ‘for it defies the linearity of the printed line’, I decide that it is equally difficult to be represented in fabric (1997, p. 186). I remember that David Hockney, experimenting with his photographic ‘joiners’, pushed the frame aside and realized that by accessing multiple vantage points, the horizon became a curve in relation to his body movements, which had him exclaim that ‘art works by telling you you’re alive’ (1999, p. 96). From Abrams perspective, the interconnection between the different viewing points not only points out that you are alive, but that the landscape is also.

One of the quilts made during this time of reflection on my identity deriving from connection to place is named *Cathedral Windows*, conceived as a celebration of the fullness of an Australian summer. Designed to emulate the shape of windows with Gothic arches, it is reminiscent of the repeated shape found in churches. At
the base of each window is a screen-printed image of the ancient Egyptian bird-headed snake Goddess lifting her arms above her head in triumph (dated at approximately 4000 BCE), symbolising a personal gesture of dignity and strength as she ‘simultaneously sends her energy deep into the earth and high into the sky’ (Austen 1990, p. 8). As a creator Goddess she holds in her body the flow between life and death, manifestation and dissolution. In this quilt, earth and sky meet in the strata between, evoking the abundance of often hidden and minute flora and animal life typical of the Australian bush. But I also am aware that the imaginary that I am unfolding is one not wholly contained by its window frame, and the blue summer skies flow out of the arched frame. The quilt is sentinel to, and invites the viewer to enter the frame, step out into the cathedrals of the forest, to the sacred groves of Earth’s fertility where her power has been ritually honoured by my indigenous European forbears from earliest times. I record in my journal that, what had begun as an experiment in technique, deepened into inspiration following a visit from two members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses group who inquired about my church attendance. It became evident to me that I did not need to go into a designated building to give witness to my personal experience of spirituality and understanding of deity. I simply had to look down into the hectares of bush that is my backyard.

As this quilt took shape I noted the paradox to the usual grid formation of a quilt in its mode of construction. In this quilt two layers of fabric are being cut through at the same time to form a second repeated shape in slightly different shades of colour. As the work progresses, and on reflection during this time, I become aware of the grid as a meta[ph]ormic symbol that parallels the structure and function of myths by providing an openly visible narrative, while allowing space/place for that which remains in the imagination – both as potent symbolic signifiers have the potential to reverse fixed and infinite depths of field. It is in the space/place of myth, as described by Krauss in her well-known curatorial thesis of 1979, that art is relieved from the mimetic and becomes autotelic, since through its lack of a diminishing perspective it offers the possibility to re-
mythologise stories and perceptions. The vertical lines of the quilt are deliberately distorted, eliciting the irregular patterns to be seen in the overlapping formations in an Australian bush landscape. Nevertheless, the form re-cognizes that, in spite of possible preconceptions about the seeming disorder and irregularity of Australian landscape forms, there are patterns that have shaped pre-colonial cultural understandings and self in relation to place, that as new arrivals we may not yet have the faculty to see.

Samhain to Yule

At the Samhain of 2002 I wrote: ‘I want to start on a new quilt for Hallowe’en, and inspiration evades me – yet it is all around I know, I just can’t visualise it.’ And feeling incompetent, impotent, I write: ‘Beliefs are such flimsy non-real things, yet they can keep us stuck.’ Creative block can look like nothing is happening, just as air is invisible and in winter months life seems dormant, (which is what it is, not life-less). I recall the invocation to elemental inspiration used in the workshops, ‘Air is the breath of inspiration,’ by describing the winds that are strong enough to blow away beliefs in our lack of creativity that keep us stuck…strong, gusty, sounding like the roar of the ocean from the beginning of time. Where do they come from? Which ‘whoosh’ sent them on their mysterious journey, wandering, dancing, frolicking, restlessly frenzied as though performing like a dervish between the worlds as they tease the trees and dishevel Earth’s hair?

(Samhain 2002)

And on this occasion the inspiration passes on with the wind into the ether of un[g]nowing.

On an earlier occasion, I am concerned about creating a piece to be included in re-fabricating the future in 2000. The exhibition occurs during the period when Samhain merges into Yule. I am busy preparing the promotions for the exhibition, and still no new idea or work becomes manifest. There are several pieces of work that have been created separately, and I recognise the glimmer of

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55 I have since continued with a series of much smaller quilts named ‘The backyard’, which develop this idea through experimenting with reverse perspective, which draws the viewer into the landscape as though to be part of it.
possibility in thinking about them and the theme. The latter was decided upon to coincide with the change of millennium and I decide to create an imaginary piece where the pasts, presents and futures of women come together visually in the work called *Womanlines*. Questions form: *In terms of our being in creation, and our creative acts that participate in the greater scheme of creation being creative, does the present contain the past and the future? Does the process of being creative (both by creating something, and by being attentive to what creation is manifesting) bring deeper awareness and understanding, the possibility for changing worldviews or perspectives?*

On considering a possible re-formation of the previous study of the phases of women’s life, three fabric bowls representing Goddess as Maiden, Mother and Crone, the panic of uncertainty starts to give way to the germination of an idea. I noted finding a small scorpion on the kitchen floor, not particularly harmful in this corner of the globe, and see it as a ‘special visitor at this time of year, cathartic, chthonic – a symbol of the ouroborous, with tail poised back on itself, ready to strike to complete the cycle…a beautiful creature, only a little bigger than the tiny frogs emerging from the murky waters of the pond. Significances in our daily lives are so rich, offered inadvertently by Earth’s manifestation, and brimming over with possibility.’

At this time of Samhain, we used mirrors in a workshop to call up our creativity, remembering the story of the Japanese Goddess of Creation, Amaterasu Omikami, she who restored Creation to order when she emerged from her dark cave and saw her beautiful, shining face mirrored back to her by the world. In my journal I note that it is the ancestors’ understandings of ‘woman as Goddess as parthenogenetic’ that inspires me to create a visible reflection of the cycle of generation of woman as maiden, mother and crone, she who brings life to the world at each of these phases. Perhaps the installation as it finally came together was precipitated by a resonation with one of the participants in the workshop,
who I noted was aware of disharmony between herself and her mother, and what she declared as ‘her need to reconnect with her mother-line through cloth.’

Before the bowls took their final shape, a flat double-sided surface was made by overlaying triangular shapes of various types of fabric according to colour, which are then stitched together by a backwards and forwards motion to create another whole piece of cloth. The triangular shape is symbol of the pubic area, the creative and regenerative powers of woman’s body. In terms of sacred geometry applied to the creative process I find it interesting to note that ‘in India the triangle was called the Mother, for it is the membrane or birth channel through which all the transcendent powers of unity (one) and its initial division into polarity (two) must pass in order to enter into the manifest realm of surface’. Robert Lawlor, writing about Indigenous art, says that the triangle acts as ‘the mother of form’ (1997, pp. 12-13). It seems that the number one represents the principle of absolute unity – therefore goddess/god, divinity, and as a statement of form can be represented by a point, or the (perfect) circle. In my journal I suggest that, as a point it can be conceived of as ‘nothing-ness’ or the ‘absolute unity that is non-being and may give way to the idea that creation comes out of nothing’, unlike the circle or cycle, no matter how small (or ‘perfect’ for that matter) out of which form inevitably arises. Nevertheless, the concept of creating out of nothing need not be excluded from a process orientation for understanding creativity: the pivotal point of a circle or wheel may be not-form as well as all form, and as the ‘stillpoint’ it is the ‘seed’ for change, movement – and creativity.

Referring to the notes made in the process of creating these three-dimensional vessels, I remark on the connection between concept and the experience of creating the vessels… that ‘the symbolic pubic triangle connecting women over ages and space is made through the stitching process of reversing and reversing back again – not strictly a circle, but nevertheless a cyclic experience. As the machine manoeuvres forwards and backwards, it provides the physical sensation of imaginary connections between women over generations and regions. In
choosing another small triangle to add to the growing ‘fabric’ of women’s bloodlines, I become more conscious that each stage contains within it the seed of the next, performing a cyclic rhythm experienced as time and space. I note that ‘it has helped me realise the relational circumstances of all experience.’ This understanding leads to another small decision: to include an element representing the cycle of transformations in women’s lives, by adding a small piece of black to the red surface of the mother’s bowl, and a piece of the white fabric to the inside of the crone’s bowl. When I came to set up the installation I record the realisation that ‘each of the three units by the other three makes the number 9, representing a completion; at whichever point you stop, the number completes the cycle, ready for the next. And each ‘contains elements of the other three stages of a woman’s life cycle sequentially in order to elicit the cyclic process of the life of woman.’ In viewing the work in installation (see p. 286), I note that

…the installation shows the continuum of rebirth. The inside of the vessel of the Crone has an image of a small white egg stitched into the base, symbolic of the virgin that will emerge. The red triangles backing the vessel of the Virgin transfer across to line the vessel for the Mother. The black that lines the vessel for the Crone is backed by the virginal white of the next generation – and so the cycle continues.

(Samhain 2001)

Although the installation of the vessels took on a different formation for the re-fabricating the future exhibition (see Appendix # 2), I noted that ‘surely this is the formation of consciousness from metaphor to metaform in continual cycle, as the visual recognition of an artifact melds with one’s life experiences, as unity in distinction!’ In my journal at this season I also note that one of the participants from the Samhain workshop ‘worked with a quiet energy, in the underworld with self, embodying that place that gives form to creation.’ And in the noting of the colour red that is so present in our ritual space at this season, from hard and juicy pomegranate seeds and soft and fleshy prickly pears, a spontaneous comment seemingly arising from nowhere, predicts the impending future of Imbolc, and reveals a glimmer of the urgency of the spring that awaits… ‘Must do my rose quilt SOON!’
Imbolc to Easter

A quilt that came into being for the season of Imbolc emerged from the meta[ph]ormic stillpoint that is both being and non-being. It is the in image of, while it is not, a window. Yet, as an image it is another of my quilts that operates as a window. Did our ancestors understand this connection between the sacredness in the representation and what is being imaged – the image embodying the sacred act of creation? In its creation and representation, the quilt named *Season of the Quickening* becomes an icon to the mystery of the flow between metaphor and metaform, and I note that it is the ‘energy of the Virgin returning and emerging from the dark womb of winter to create herself anew through unreserved power to give and receive.’

My notes again show interest in the grid formation as symbolising manifestation – being-ness coming into form, while offering the possibility of another perspective. Apart from the visible grid formation at the bottom of the quilt, I noted that ‘I can see and feel the layers of the hidden grid behind, both in the design and in the stitched quilting’; and that having started with a broad separation of interlocking horizontal and vertical lines, the gaps between seemed to become smaller in dimension. As I re-cross the grid with another row of stitching, I become aware of the fact that no matter how close the lines become, a space would always remain. I describe it as ‘the space of the creative void, which Derrida has referred to as fissures, gaps in which to acknowledge “difference”…and by the way, the possibility of change’ which cannot simply be reversed through the application of the historically accumulated power of logocentric structures alone, but by revealing the dichotomy of their inferences within contexts – the ‘hinge’ terms, containing multiple meanings, which are the ‘raw materials’ from which binaries have emerged through social construction (cited in Grosz 1989, pp. 29-31). I make note of what seems to me to be the ‘deeply spiritual’ aspect of Derrida’s tactics for dealing with oppositional dualism through reversal and displacement. I describe his method for the deconstruction of language as text, as ‘courting the Mystery by engaging in changing consciousness at will, the definition of magic’.
In a symbolic overlay of his language, I note that quilts form images from material ‘remainders’ and ‘excesses’, and in the process provide spaces and gaps for ‘destabilising’ viewpoints by ‘dancing with and from’ different perspectives – all these terms used by Derrida seem so appropriate to what I am doing for the creation of a quilt. *Is this yet another way of seeing our role in the creative process, as enabling and being enabled by engaging with change?*

At the season of Mabon (2000) I had noted responses to Husserl’s explanation of intersubjectivity as life as it is lived and experienced before our analysis of it, and in the same entry realise that I am discovering the ‘sentience’ of being by playing in the Life-world and re-cognising my reception of it. This seems to continue into the season following the awakening at Imbolc, the season of spring. I write about ‘seeing a raindrop fall from the branches above onto a leaf below, a leaf which caught its fall, as it bounced slightly on touch down. The drop and the leaf held each other, motionless, in an embrace of restful trust…waiting.’ *Which one will make the next move?* In terms of a process theology, one that regards embodiment and embeddedness in nature as ‘inherently religious’ and in reciprocal relationship to the process of Creation, a sense of this interaction is becoming clearer through my embodied experience of nature around me, and in particular in observing its unfolding through my creative work.

There is a playfulness in the creation of *Vernal Equinox: spring blooms*, which I note comes from the recognition of ‘my immersion in and collaboration with the Mystery that is Creation …in constant playful desire’ to create (see p. 292). There is always a point of surprise in the creative process, providing opportunity. I take heed of advice from Thomas Berry to ‘[p]lunge into the work of living as surprise becomes aware of surprise…shine with the freedom and frolic and fecundity of creative play’ (1984, p. 122-3) as another question rises to the surface from the dark well of the creative unknown: *am I the thing that I create as much as it is me?* The concept for this quilt aims to reverse the conventional way of seeing through a window into the natural bush environment where I live, so that by
looking through the frame of the window the bush appears to be inside, rather than outside. The inspiration also came about in response to a newspaper article I had read with regard to the early Catholic Church hierarchy setting a fixed date for Easter, in spite of the fact that the full moon is visible over three consecutive days from different vantage points on Earth. As another of the re-configuring quilts for the Wheel of the Year for the Southern Hemisphere, shutters are thrown open welcome the light re-turning to an Australian bushland scene, while the four window-pain blocks at the centre provide the design balance by showing what is seen. The sense of a relational reciprocity with the environment in which I live and work is expressed as ‘wanting to interpret the landscape in fabric as the landscape of my soul’ (Lammas 2002).

It is becoming clear that being truly at home with, at one with surprise, offers the opportunity for all manner of creative responses, from the way we behave in daily interactions to an unpredictable change of direction in the construction of a quilt. One of the smaller quilts made during the cycle of the research, The Memory of Water contains within its borders a vast amount of text for the reading that actually continues to overflow the borders, breach the containment as I start to think about the many manifestations of water (see p. 294). When I start to think about water it becomes clear that water as embodied symbol is indeed perfect for the Equinox, the season of balance; water twice daily enact the point of balance on the currents of the great womb of creation, the ocean waters of Earth. In the creation of this little quilt I became aware, cognisant of, and particularly, felt all of the stages in the creative process. I step unknowingly into the creative cycle in which I gestate and bring to form a quilt from the multiplicity of metaphors that hold the image and the process of creating in a time-beyond-space and a space-beyond-time as thoughts about water flood in! Stories come and go, ‘flood into memory’ as I record grappling to transform the multiplicity and complexity of ideas into one small quilt using a simple grid of square and rectangular formations, which had been the attraction of various bathroom floors! I note ‘the multiple manifestations of water as underground streams, oceans, snow and ice;
the water cycle shows water as clouds, rain, rivers, even dank muddy holes; that there is an abundant number of ways of referring to snow amongst northern arctic peoples; that more than 75% of the human body is made up of water; and that water can be expressed in tempestuous and destructive modes, as well as providing healing and being regenerative’. I tested scientific premises about water: it always flows downhill - how does this adequately described the movement of water on the spherical face of the globe? Rivers carve out huge canyons, dry up seasonally, and return. And then, water is supposedly tasteless, colourless and odourless.

The naming of a quilt comes at various stages in its creation. For this quilt another surprise occurred in the form of serendipity when I watch a TV program on the work of an early twentieth century French scientist, Jean Benvenista, into the possible energy of homeopathic remedies stored in water. In the process of creating the quilt from ideas that multiply and brim over I keep repeating the words as a mantra, ‘the memory of water’. I was not aware of how the name would give this quilt a greater magnitude than thought possible for its size. Wanting to keep the design simple, elemental, I began with a regular structure of squares using hand-dyed fabrics in colours that I think relate to water. Of course, it became difficult to contain all the stories by which one could talk about water in such a confined formation. I struggled with how to represent these ideas visually using the chosen fabrics. Having used a variety of hues and tones in blues and greens, from a deep navy to pale azure with pink, the surprise occurred in the last minute inclusion of hand-dyed red fabric. Even though I had considered using my son’s cloth nappies for wadding, remembering the waters of the womb, I had forgotten to visually include the red of the life-giving blood waters of the womb!

In stitching the three layers together and considering fabric for the backing, there was another surprise in store. Using a long kept piece of voile printed with an Indian woodblock for the backing and quilting from the back, I found that the
design imitated an outline of Ishtar-Astarte, ancient Sumerian goddess with wide buttocks and bountiful breasts pouring forth nourishing milk. She wasn’t going to be left out of my conversation with water! At this time, I also make note of a desire to create an ‘Earth’ quilt from memories recorded on the trip to Broken Hill, but the inspiration refuses to take spark as yet.

**Beltane to Litha**

In the process of its creation *Beltane Fires* fully embodied the creative cycle of creation through the three stages of dissolution, differentiation and autopoesis several times round (see p. 288). Inspired by visual memories of seeing the setting sun reflected from ancient land forms in the Blue Mountains, and ‘memories’ of ancient fires lit at Beltane to celebrate the return of summer and life-energy, the creation process of this quilt demanded that each of the three stages be fully experienced several times over the duration of two years, (down to the point of having each stage professionally photographed, since I had thought it was the final form). The quilt began to take form at Beltane, using hand-dyed fabrics that made images of an ancient fiery sun still shining on the timeless landscape of the Blue Mountains leap into flame. It offered ‘the exciting prospect of binding a new relationship between the old in the new’ in all its multiple facets, ‘flaming into a huge conflagration, desirous of harmony and synergy.’ *How to elicit the possibility for a way of becoming that reconciles people and land, especially people who have come from another land bringing stories originating in other places and imposing them on to this great Southern Land, and on those who know it differently?*

In spite of some frustration, the transitions were relatively smooth, and at the conclusion of each stage, ‘the land spoke of the creative journey: we are not there yet, it seemed to be saying’. I noted the incompleteness as a ‘feeling that so far it is only the base canvas’ that will need to be ‘painted’ further. Whatever had fired the initial passion waxed and waned several times, but did not abate. This quilt was not willing to be put to rest for long, and I realised the need to ‘stay
with the process’. After adding the full moon rising over the escarpment in the centre, the urgency to pro-create took on full force, and I note that ‘it needs to become three separate pieces, or even more... so that it can extend across an entire stretch of wall, and even around corners!’ Other plans for creation proliferate with the fuel of passionate intention, but the flames of the largest fire eventually die back, and the quilt is content with its final form having arrived at the fullness of its autopoiesis, or as I note: ‘This quilt insisted on effecting its own redemption at each stage’.

The final form to be taken is a triptych, resonant with the previous quilt made for Beltane. By extending the length of the two side panels it became a mirror image, yet quite independent, ‘like an amoeba splitting to continue the cycle of creation’ I note. The pieces used to extend the length of each side were ‘impregnated’ with vulva and flame-like shapes with the possibility for cutting back into the layers beneath, sewing into the fabric new fires that could be revealed when the quilt is hung at the next re-turn of the season.

The passionate spirit of Beltane spilling over into the quilt came to designate the fullness of the summer and the beginning of earth’s seasons of growing dark. In noting that ‘I am again seeking to celebrate the sacred yoni, life force held in the body of woman, Season of the Rose as it came to be called, was, as mentioned, based on a drawing for a banner to represent a totemic emblem for the heroine in one of the children’s stories I read to my son as a young child (see p. 291) . As the form of a banner emerged to become the shape of this quilt, I note in my journal that ‘...it is a vital context for the symbolism since, as the dictionary says, banners give identity and profess principles. It also is like a headline – says it all in a few words.’ I also note that banners were used in the British Suffrage Movement where the social construction of femininity in association of embroidery was being used, not so much to transform the place and function of art, ‘but to change ideas about women and femininity... they wanted embroidery
to evoke femininity – but femininity represented as a source of strength, not as evidence of women’s weakness. It is without irony that I noted:

The rose quilt is my love quilt; it is my deepest held passions for all that I hold sacred, and is constantly asking for more consideration, a deeper looking, a deeper feeling, a clearer expression.

(Litha 2001)

In order to attain the clearer expression, it sought dissolution and had to be unpicked several times. Being constructed from long strips of pieced fabrics, the formation required to give the impression of a rose in full bloom was done by working intuitively and visually – ‘by trusting the heart song… as the creative fire that takes no wood’ as it was described so well by Angeles Arrien, referring to our life dream which, though it may not be verbalized lives in the spaces in between, is ‘the beauty of what you love’ and offers the possibility of ‘a thousand ways home.’ Two questions arise in considering the formation of this quilt, relating to the full expression of love and desire, becoming more clearly articulated and more urgent as the quilt took form. How can we re-view an economy of desire that is inclusive and embodied – fully relational?

I note that the word ‘rose’ is an anagram for eros, meaning love of life, form coming into being out of chaos through the desire to connect Another check for etymology and symbolic meaning indicated the universal significance of the rose (the lotus is another variation) in relation to the life-force that resides in and given form through women’s bodies; expressed sexually through embodied connection, the rose symbolises the sacred site/sight of the yoni, vulva. The banner to the rose simply demanded attention, blossoming into fullness from multiple sources that desired recognition. In summarising the process, I write in my journal: ‘this quilt requires that I trust its process. That is why it is so demanding of my

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57 Angeles Arrien in The Fabric of the Future: Women Visionaries of Today Illuminate the Path for Tomorrow, edited by M.J. Ryan (1998, pp. 96-104). The articles in the book reflect on what is needed for our psychospiritual transformation to live ‘at the crossroads’. The editor asserts that their ‘writing articulates sacred possibilities…to invigorate our own unique contributions to the creation of a future world, as women having ‘listening eyes and vision seeking hearts’ and ‘a passionate faith in the power of the feminine to awaken the life force within’ (pp. xv-xvi). I am inspired!
attention.’ Despite the anxiety and annoyance at the constant need to re-view and re-construct in the process of its creation, the clear inference is that the process is about making visible a deep sense of relatedness, one to be seen in ‘the bigger picture… inviting a fullness of expression that can be shared and enjoyed in full chorus with the other.’ I begin to see it as a ‘banner to life and love, calling me back for its completion, as sometimes sleep does in order to complete the sequence of a dream’. As I continued to reflect on the symbolism of the rose, I realised that there was something very powerful in this quilt. It became a metaphor for an economy of desire, and visualised the possibility that women can effect a differentiation of desire that is distinct from that held to be so in the patriarchal economy, by engendering a metaform from our own deep experience according to our own design.

It may look something like a quilt, with both a back and a front, providing a space in which the pleasures of giving and receiving are proportionate to and offering an augmentation of self-identification, not from the perspective of loss or gain by one or the other, but through direct reciprocity of experiential gnowing.

(Litha 2001)

Like all the other quilts, this banner ‘allows me to tell my story, hopes, dreams, symbolically, to share them, and have them witnessed’. The notes in my journal refer to thoughts about another aspect of the economy of desire in the process of experiencing desire for selfhood, self-creating-self – an urgency to explore the ‘new self’ in the process of creating one’s self. It is described as positioning oneself in the gaps and fissures whilst remaining relational through a process of a type of mirroring that allows relationship to remain, because ‘relationality communicates by means of a direct path to the consciousness of the other.’ Unlike the effect on self-concept that occurs ‘in response to a dualistic oppositional paradigm, which I often experience as a lessening of love and desire, of personal power, staying in and trusting the process of what is in creation – albeit painful – by both resisting the impulse to control or succumb to the controlling, opens the space to explore the creation of one’s self anew.’ The mirroring process that I am thinking of is enunciated in the form of a prayer, for
‘beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence.’ On reflection, it became clear that I was experiencing a strong need to be in relationships that were felt as reciprocal, with self and other, through the making of the rose quilt. It was an imperative that I was feeling as the abundance of chaos where freedom and creativity abound, and the compulsion of singular attraction for creation as mutually inclusive. How might inclusion and differentiation be experienced in the process of re-constructing desire for self?

As I sit patiently with its desire and resistance to be completed, through what at this stage seem to be ‘purely technical difficulties’, the rose quilt nevertheless ‘seems to be becoming totemic’. It seems to be starting to embody the immanence of desire, and its transcendence at the same time, over time and space. It is becoming ‘a vessel, a container of the sacred and acting as a dispenser of sacred processes of creation through change and interaction, with the capacity to ‘receive and dispense limitlessly’”. This does of course involve a resistance, and the quilt seems to embody this for me. I record it as a form of passive resistance, non-violent opposition to the requirement of relationships …as it seeks to mirror relational ways of joy and pleasure that cannot easily be voiced within a paradigm that condones and courts opposition. It is a resistance to being at the effect of identifying myself as woman through guidelines that continually position me as ‘other’ – otherness being the fundamental attitude on which patriarchy was built and out of which it continues to act.

(Litha 2001)

In this sense it is a suffragette banner that questions positions and attitudes that have become internalized as a self-identity built in the name of values that give privilege to domination, competition and material possession. I noted that ‘women have long been colonized by these values and attitudes thereby contributing to their own disempowerment.’ As a totemic banner to the female metaphor for the divine, I am aware of the burning need I have ‘to give witness through the rose quilt to a sense of the sacred that is experienced as wholeness through recognizing the sacred indwelling in self, as in all Creation.’

58 These ideas precipitated from Margaret Wheatley’s article (in Ryan1998, pp. 82-95) and lead back to the question: what are we creating through our acts of creativity?
Towards the completion of the rose quilt the on-coming season of Lammas is evident, and the banner to the season of heat of passion, love of life, is also ‘witness to the mystery of the unbroken circle, and the cycle of creativity’ that is experienced as ‘our immersion in the fullness, the wholeness of lived experience, including the pain.’ In noting the many difficulties encountered during the process of creating the quilt, I make reference to the design as ‘having been created in a lineal way, making it difficult to create a non-lineal perspective, such is the problem with the writing process.’ Yet in giving form to the back of the quilt, I feel a resolution, a coming to restfulness after experiencing through the creation of this quilt ‘the cycle of creation and destruction: the pain and the anger, the joy and satisfaction.’ I have always thought that the back of a quilt is as important as its front. In its completion I come back to the land, Earth as home, and in observing the land around me I noted that ‘the rose of my quilt is in fact a waratah – a fitting banner for the season of Litha in the Southern Hemisphere!’

The rose/waratah quilt came together by the inclusion of the four directional patches on the back ‘to represent the four corners of the world, and a cruciate symbol at the centre brings the four corners meeting at the centre, contained by the round of Earth’s horizons.’ I have some lovely fabrics containing graphic roses, and finding a correlation between the word flower as ‘flow-er’ and women’s menstrual cycle that is the seat of the Mystery that is Creation, I am intent on including a pictographic emblem on the back of the banner, ‘language of the banner’s tribe’. I record my understanding of ‘the tribe’ as ‘all form and all non-form, the visible and the invisible, being and not-yet-being, distinct ‘roses’ and the symbol that represents ‘rose’, in creative relationship that is mutually defining, whilst being relational and also particular.’ It is a banner held in honour of and intended to record and invoke desire as fully autochthonic, spiritually and emotionally embedded and embodied in self and other.

It is in the play between light and dark that gives the ecology, space, urge and desire for flowers to pass through all stages to reach full bloom. The nine-patch on the back of the quilt signals the end of a phase. Resting on
a background of fertile ochre red, like the blood which lines the womb in readiness for a re-birth, a tiny bud forms, heralding the next round of growth.  

(Lammas 2001)

While completion that leads to inception inhere in this quilt celebrating the fullness of the creative process, there is another space to be stepped into in order to fully experience completion, that of dissolution. I note that the Lammas season usually comes fast, with new seeds drifting by, some collected while others float by for another creative occasion. To follow is the Mabon spirit of ‘...breaking down old and familiar ways in order to prepare a return to self as source and to meet that energy we call 'death’, that which the life-force requires for a re-turn on the Wheel… by returning to the centre of the rose’, which is of course the beginning of the new cycle on the Wheel of the Year, at the season of Samhain.

**The cycle ends and begins**

The small quilt I have called *The Coincidence of Opposites* both symbolises and embodies differentiation into form, the inter-relationship between light and dark, which is the regularity within change that is at the heart of the creative process (see p.293). Representing a spiritual path followed on and symbolised by the Wheel of the Year, this quilt is deeply embedded in nature’s cycles. I feel its embodiment in myself, the changing colour of leaves, the home fire being lit. At this season of the change into the darkest quarter of the year, as daylight shortens dramatically, I note as the quilt starts to form: ‘I am loving the warm dark velvet of my soul space at Hallowe’en, and as we move onto Yule.’ For many years I have wondered how to hold in one quilt the Mystery of the Wheel of the Year that is the changing seasons; to express it as spiritual path that is also a physical journey, one that is personal and applicable across time and space. And though many ideas have come forward over the seasons of creativity, none took root until the season of Samhain in 2002. The seed had unknowingly been stored in the way I had over the years meta[ph]ormically put together a symbolic Wheel of the Year for the ritual space for our workshops, using the overlay of light and dark cloths to show the points of Solstices and Equinoxes.
As I start gathering the small triangles left over from making the vessels for the triple Goddess of Virgin, Mother and Crone, it occurs to me that ‘perhaps I am returning the metaform of the ritual space to the metaphor’, wondering about the significance of this at the early stage of construction. I press on ‘feeling the energy of the Virgin, ready to give myself to the dark.’ I marvel at the connection with and love I feel for her, and her capacity to bring about her ‘parthenogenetic course of rebirth at Samhain, traditionally the season of the Crone, giving renewal through and to the energy of the Virgin.’ As I layer the triangles to create an area of darkness I note that ‘I am forming smaller triangles, receding into the past or towards the future where the horizons meld and are invisible. The only obvious ‘horizons’ are where the light and darkness meet as one’. The question noted so long ago, at a now distant horizon I might say, has taken another dimension. Rather than requiring a definition, the ‘indigenous consciousness/spirit’ that I am seeking to engender through understanding my creativity as spiritual process in deep connection with sacred Creation emerges as another series of questions. How do we know the divine presence in our lives? How do we know an ‘indigenous consciousness/spirit’ at work in our lives? How do we perceive the tracks, and recognise them as our own?

Starting to quilt stitches in a grid formation across one quarter of the circle, I note that…

there is no closure along these horizons, (both the light and dark sections of the quilt, and the stitched grid); they can go on forever. Looking into the space of the ‘gap’ created as the ‘horizons’ of stitching unfold one after the other, what it holds remains palpably open and available – either light or dark, always accompanied by form. It keeps us within the horizon, perceiving something immanent, whether we see the lines of the grid as close together or far apart, present or absent. Even when we don’t see them, they are there to be sensed, as an awareness of the paradox, as some have called it, which is the Mystery of Creation, seemingly invisible yet able to be visualised on the Wheel of the Year in the play between light and dark, and clearly visible in the world of forms around us. I note that…
seeing the coincidence of opposites as it is experienced through the Wheel of the Year made visible in this little quilt reveals the mystery that is the interchangeable nature of metaphor and metaform, born in desire to be reconciled, while realising the need to differentiate for creation.

(Samhain 2002)

For the exhibition in 2002, *re-fabricating our indigenous spirit*, I want to make the connection really obvious through this quilt as mandala, that of the reciprocal relationship between the metaphor (how we ‘see’ the world) and the metaform, the form the world takes. I remember that ‘human kind has been creating such mandalas to honour the elements of creation, the earth, air, fire and water that give breath to their own body-spirit as divine manifestation for generation after generation. In some cases they create and destroy them to symbolize the incessant flow and transformation that occurs on a daily basis.’ Having found inspiration from the altar cloths used in ritual to visualise our place on the Wheel of the Year, the quilt ‘is seeking its metaform, to be ‘earthed’ by using the cloths that give form to our ritual – to create sacred space, both in the gallery, and to present the idea that the world is sacred space.’ This is my intention, and so the metaphorical quilt takes on another dimension, that of its meta{ph}orm, and they ‘sit side by side as though mirroring each other’ for the period of the exhibition. In thinking about the ancient significance of sacred mandalas, I remark that ‘…my metaphor/metaform will be exhibited for six weeks then be ‘destroyed’ until another showing in the season that follows.’

**Cycling through a personal creative process**

(or meeting Medusa in metaform) 59

When gestating ideas for the next quilt, I usually find valuable signifiers in the events of my personal life and accompanying emotional responses, which I often write in a journal, sometimes making simple sketches. Without developing a

59 According to the Hellenic period from which we have received many creational stories, Medusa was shape-shifted into the mask of a gorgon at the behest of Athena following the rape of Medusa in her holy temple.
precise plan for a quilt, these signifiers become transformed through observing
the natural environment at the time, the colours in the flora, the movement of
animals and birds. Initially, these subtle influences play more of a part in the
construction of the quilt than thoughts about design. What follows is a creation
story, written whilst seeking inspiration for a quilt for the season of Lammas. At
the time, I noticed a confusion of feelings – the need for protection amongst
them. I was disquieted, uncomfortable with myself, angry and frustrated, feeling
stuck in my creative endeavours. It seemed that I was unable to take control,
unable to draw any boundaries, form distinctions, or make separations.

Although many visions for a quilt for Lammas have dropped into view, seeded
from past ideas, I am lacking any impulses or energies to bring them into form.
They seem to have turned to stone, and to have included me in their rocky
outcrop. In this season of Imbolc I feel something gestating in the dark, and not
sure how it will form, realise how much I long for the return of spring with its
unstoppable movement to bring into form that which has been dormant under the
skin for the long months of winter. (Lammas)

It is difficult to sit in the dark and watch images flit by like butterflies, not really
knowing what to do with them. Some present themselves as opportunities to be
followed up, and turn into tricksters, coyotes or dingoes spinning yarns, telling
only half the story. I have felt saddened, disinclined to test out their authenticity. I
know I have to wait longer, like the menstruant in her dark hut, not touching
ground or self, keeping the world in place by shedding her blood. In her
disciplined way of being at the full dark time of the moon, she knows it is her
body which has the power to create light – and dark. Her blood sorts and
separates - light from dark, the earth from the waters, being from non-being.
(Mabon)

Feeling abandoned, I sit and wait. Of course, I don’t sit – there is a house to run,
others to care for, with love and attention. And I do touch the ground. I dig in the
earth, looking for inspiration and avoiding confronting its lack, planting bulbs and seedlings to assure myself that life continues, even in the dark. The ground is hard and unyielding, seemingly fruitless in its constant seeding, shedding of itself. When will the barrenness I feel be over so that I can again bring something into form - Self into a form by which to become visible? And of course my body is touched, yet I feel that my heart has left me in this dark space. With deepening trust of the moon’s reflection as the ebb and flow of creativity, I abandon myself to the dark unknowing. (Samhain)

Images, stories, ideas scattered all round earlier have become buried, seemingly lost! Still I am not allowed to touch anything least the power of separation be lost. To find the seed buried deep in the soil I must separate and sort - experiences, emotions, words, shapes, colours. But how can I do that without touching? Without seeing? Without moving? The feeling of discomfort will pass. I know and trust that when I find the seed that has taken root in the dark soil of unknowing, joyous capitulation will follow. I have memories of the experience of the at-oneness, arising within the confusion felt in diversity. Born from my body, in harmony with earth and sky, I remember that the separation of light from dark is kept in place in the act of being at the dynamic still point. At this moment, there is a birth, but of what I am unsure. (Yule)

Then, at the dark moon before spring equinox, I remember that other menstruants sit with me in the darkness. I am not alone in the process of creating the world. Amongst them is Medusa, raised off the ground, sitting in ritual pose, resisting the urge to tame the moving snakes of her hair. She has been keeping me company in these times. We stare at each other through the dark. She reminds me that together, out of the darkness, we call forth the new moon. (Imbolc)

Unexpectedly, in this state of ritual inaction we meet, the Goanna and I. Archaic Medusa is in the garden below. Frozen, we eyeball each other and are unsure
whether to move, in awe, afraid. Is it time to move closer, to pinch myself in wonder? As I follow her swift meander down to the rocks below, this beautiful creature strikes excitement and fear into my heart, which has returned to beating softly. There is anticipation. What does she have to show me? Will I be able to see it? She disappears – into thin air, or back into the darkness. Surely she can’t be clinging to the almost vertical surface of the other side of the rock? (Easter)

I look around, and see nothing. I listen. The rock tells me to sit, be still, wait and wonder. In my bones, I feel the immanence of the wild and the unfamiliar. There is no plan to this encounter. Stay still as time fades. Feel her dark skin in the rock. We are one, she and me within place, interconnected by our fear and our curiosity. We share the same tingling blood, yet how far dare we explore each other’s being. Will all disappear in doing so? We breathe the same air, cling to the same rock as it decomposes quietly under our feet. Time closes over. Minutes later an ancient stone-like head appears, eye glaring, proud, beautiful, motionless for a second, before disappearing again. (Beltane)

I feel a burning passion to see her, talk with her, be loved by her, stay with her forever. How close does she want me to come? I want to undo the binds keeping us apart, take another initiation to erase memory of our separation, to embrace our shared creation. In her time, she comes forward from the darkness of the crevice into full light. First her powerful head emerges, then she leaves, carrying her body low to the ground, her long tail waving through the leaf litter. (Litha)

We must separate for now. I long for the next time we meet, to recall together the archaic memories of an at-one-ness hidden within and scattered without. How silly it is to say that we breathe the same air, share the same blood - we are so different. How silly it is to say that we are so different. Don’t we coincide as the Mystery in the light and the dark of our beings?
Figure 25: Catalogue of quilts for 'The Wheel Turns'.

CATALOGUE
of quilts created in the process
of re-visioning the Wheel of the Year
in the Southern Hemisphere
1999 - 2003

The Sabbats are the eight points in which we connect the inner and the outer cycles: the interstices where the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative, and the personal meet. As we enact each drama in its time, we transform ourselves. We are renewed, we are reborn even as we decay and die. We are not separate from each other, from the broader world around us; we are one with the Goddess, with the God. As the Cone of Power rises as the season changes, we arouse the power from within, the power to heal, the power to change our society, the power to renew the earth.

Starhawk, (1989)
Cathedral Windows (150x100cms)
Hand-dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted; cotton batting

Ages of Woman: Maiden, Mother, Crone (150x220x80cms)
Assorted fabric types, machine pieced and quilted. Bowls made from triangular shapes’ machine stitched, stiffened with canvas.

Season of the Quickening (138x94cms)
Hand-dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted; cotton batting

Beltane Fires (125x110cms)
Hand-dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted; cotton batting

Bush blanket (177x118cms)
Cotton fabrics, machine pieced and quilted; cotton batting

Horizons in Time: Past, Present and Future (50x37cms)
Hand-dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted; cotton batting, silk backing

Season of the Rose 2000 (146x90cms)
Thai raw silks, commercial cottons over-dyed, machine pieced and quilted; felt batting

Vernal Equinox: spring blooms (91x145cms)
Hand-dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted; cotton batting

The Coincidence of opposites (85x85cms)
Assorted fabric types, fused; machine stitching and quilting, reverse applique

The Memory of Water (94x55cms)
Hand-dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted; Indian woodblock printed backing
Artist Statement

*Art has the potential to reconfigure our intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual orientation in the world.*

(Suzi Gablik, 1992, p. 93)

In working creatively with textiles I am developing a deeper personal understanding of how the visual arts profoundly influence the beliefs by which we live – that visual representations of ‘reality’ have the power to profoundly affect a worldview. Art is inherently about creativity (rather than ‘re-production’), it is a process more than a product. The role of the artist may be considered sacred. The process of making art provides the space for the exploration of a reflexive relationship between inner and outer worlds, the now and then, imagining a ‘bigger picture’. The real becomes so by being imagined. It is by means of this process that artistic creation and social change occur in cyclic reciprocity. Art is a profoundly political and religio/spiritual act – and a special potential for women in contemporary culture is the fabric medium for giving expression to this process.

The motivation for my artwork is in recognising environmental and social conditions that point to the need to re-imagine our relationship to the Earth and each other as one of immanent connection and interdependence – towards developing a new ecology of consciousness. Such a relationship could be considered spiritual - one which embodies the ‘indigenous spirit’ working with nature on nature’s terms. I sense that our forebears felt such a connection to their environment and social group, which has come down to us through their art, stories and religious celebrations, many of which need unravelling. Encouraging re-newed perceptions through art may offer the chance for a new way of responding - awakening a new/old response-ability to the environmental destruction and social disintegration which seems to be threatening our well-being and possibly our continuance as a human species.
The quilts become forms that seek to elicit a sense of ancient wisdoms transposed via the visual medium as relevant for our times. The artworks form a bridge to forgotten sensibilities, which remain attainable today. My quilts embody a personal awareness of the flux between continuity and change - in particular, the process of synchronising the transposition of a European cultural heritage to the Southern Hemisphere. They thereby create cultural story in continuity with the old heritage whilst forming new ties to this South Land of my birth. The visual representation of these concepts is often by means of the combination of a traditional block or style, which is applied in tandem with contemporary forms of construction and design.

The initial series of eight quilts created to mark the festival days of the old European and Celtic calendar known as The Wheel of the Year particularly exemplify this process. Exhibited together, they form an installation to the sacred process of creation seen in the annual cycle of Earth around Sun, and were created as integral to the presentation for a research Masters thesis as recorded in my book entitled Seasons of the Soul: the Wheel of the Year in Quilts. The quilts often contain symbolic elements of contemporary Earth-centred spiritual perceptions, re-emerging from origins in the ancient myths of indigenous peoples of Northern Europe; they are sacred stories which have come down to us through our current religious and social traditions, the origins of which having mostly been forgotten. Such stories evoke memories of ‘the mysticism of the land itself that goes beyond the country’s political and economic needs – a love of the earth itself, respect for its intrinsic worth’ (Gablik 1992, p. 93). These underlying principles continued to influence my work in developing a body of art quilts for my PhD by exploring and re-visioning a feminist spiritual and creative imaginary as experienced and reflected on through the process of creating quilts for the Wheel of the Year in the Southern Hemisphere. I am committed to exploring through my creative quilt making, the connections between one of women’s oldest art forms and the active development of social and cultural theory in the contemporary Australian context.
The quilts and their creation stories

Most fine evenings, as the sun sinks behind the ridge of mountains to the west, the glow which slowly spreads across the sky sets my heart singing with the majesty and wonder of our planet’s daily journey, and her kindness in bringing the dark so that we can see a different aspect of her beauty at night - and, thankfully, take a rest. Her movements set the rhythm of daily life, and provide inspiration for my quilt making.

The quilt images the consciousness of our early ancestors, who gathered in sacred groves as their place of ritual worship to the mystery they acknowledged being enacted in their daily lives – under the archway formed by the branches and the canopy of endless sky. Theirs was an imaginary of intimate connection to Earth’s processes of creation through destruction.

Figure 26: Cathedral Windows 1998 (150x100cms)
The three phases of women’s lives are imaged here through the three bowls or vessels, using traditional colours: white for the virgin, red for the blood of the mother, and black for knowledge of the Mystery which often brings life’s most salient lessons. The vessels symbolise women’s bodies, understood from earliest times as the primary sacred vessel, giving life and receiving it back in death for a renewal of life.

Each stage of a woman’s life, the wisdom of the crone, the dependability of the mother, the autonomy of the maiden, contains elements of the other two. As life-giving waters flow from one vessel into another, so do the qualities by which women experience transformation in all stages of life. Woman’s story has most often been recorded via the use of cloth. Working with fabric gives me a strong sense of connection to the women who have gone before, as well as those to come.

Figure 27: Ages of Woman: Maiden, Mother, Crone 1999 (150x220x80cms)
As the southern half of our planet starts to turn back towards the Sun after the longest night at Winter Solstice, the bush wattles respond with an ever-growing display of pale and vibrant yellows. It is a sign that life forming energies are returning, bringing reassurance and joy, as do the first-felt movements of new life growing in the womb. This quilt is one in a series of ‘window quilts’, and combines conventional stripping with innovative free-cutting techniques to evoke a sense of both continuity and change felt in the cycle of Earth’s seasonal expressions.

Figure 28: Season of the Quickening 1999 (138x94cms)
The bountiful beauty of the Blue Mountains National Park is reflected by the fiery energy of the ancient escarpments at sunsets. Blessed to live within easy access of this unique and wonderful wilderness, the magic of these cliffs as the sun sets constantly reminds me of the fragile heritage which is ours to both take care of and to enjoy.

Figure 29: Beltane Fires 1999 (125x110cms)
This quilt borders on the traditional bed quilt in size (and is sometimes used as such), though the blocks are formed from a ‘free cut’ template. Perhaps it is reminiscent of the Australian ‘waggas’, not only in theme, but also in that the back is made from used flour sacks that have been mono-printed with gum leaves. Fabrics are 100% cotton and Australian by design.

Figure 30: Bush Blanket 1999 (front and back) (177x118cms)
The horizon is the meeting place of two realms: the solid and tangible presence of earth, and the seeming empty and unknown nothingness of sky - a place which may be conceptualised as that point where two lips meet in reciprocity to engage in creative exchange. It is a shifting place of mystery where the past and future meet in the present to continually form and re-form our understanding of ourselves in relation to our place in the world. As inspiration for quilt making, the ancient escarpments of the Blue Mountains elicit in me the awe and beauty of the mystery of all creation.

Figure 31: Horizons in Time: Past, Present and Future 2000 (50x37cms)
My Jewish ancestors were deported from London and arrived in Van Dieman’s Land in 1823. For me as sixth generation descendent, stories of loss and separation have given place to a full-bloom belonging in this South Land. The symbolism of the rose is shared by many cultures, representing eros (its anagram meaning lust for life) - Greek for ‘life force’. The rose patches on the back of the quilt are the four corners of the globe from which people have come to Australia, joined by the cruciate symbol in the centre, another ancient symbol which celebrates the unity found in diversity. The rose is symbol of life’s passion to renew itself in beauty and strength, fragility and endurance, through the endless cycles of destruction and creation. It honours the 15 billion years of creation, when this numinous energy flared forth to unfold its desire for the creation of the Universal, in which we participate. It is icon to this continual blossoming through the body and blood of woman - a cross-cultural icon representing the sacred vulva, or yoni, as the seat of and gateway from which all life arises. The rose is sacred emblem to Goddesses in many cultures, expressing desire for union with the Mystery that is Life.

Figure 32: Season of the Rose 2000 (146x90cms)
This spring window quilt was inspired by the wonderful variety of wattle and the extravaganza of flowers to be seen at the season of rebirth. In spite of their differences – some displaying warm, gentle colours, others boldly blazing forth, they blend and meld into an exuberant welcome to life’s renewal.

Figure 33: Vernal Equinox: spring blooms 2002 (91x145cms)
This quilt is a mandala for contemplation on the spirals of ever-changing constancy brought witnessed in Earth’s seasonal cycles. It refers to a term used by mid 15\textsuperscript{th} century mystical cleric, Nicolas of Cusa, to describe his experience of the Divine. For me, it refers to the integration of opposites inevitably occurring within the creative process, Earth’s seasons forming a template for the interaction between light and dark, destruction and renewal, which coincide in the sacred act of creation. It is an experience of that place/sensation which is the dynamic still point – the place of the Mystery, the Goddess, the God - however it is that one gives recognition to the interaction of creative forces as Source in the process of bringing into form.

As inheritor of Western European values and cultural perceptions it seems to be a case of choosing either/or. The best-case scenario is a blending, which eliminates returning to the unifying experience of the source. Both of these approaches ignore the integration of opposites as occurring within the creative process. Earth’s seasonal cycles of creation are a template recognised by our forebears as replicated in their own mini-cycles of birth, growth, death, decay and rebirth – creation out of destruction. The cycles are spirals of ever-changing constancy. The quilt may be hung all four sides.

\hspace{2cm}\textbf{Figure 34: The Coincidence of opposites 2001 (85x85cms)}
One of the four sacred elements, water has the power to effect personal transformation and take us into the realms of mystery through our shared memories. Ritual water is often used for purifications and blessings, and in initiations, with the perceived power to effect personal transformation and take us into its enchanted mystery by sharing some of its memories. What memories do we share with water? Tidal waters remember the pull of the moon on a daily basis, and menstrual waters the moonflow of women's blood cycles. Subterranean waters remember the power of the dark, while uterine waters remember the source of life! Water remembers the feeling of flying with the clouds, of carving flowing courses across the land, and of becoming frozen into solid shapes; of being more exuberant and sparse! The more I contemplated the memory of water, the more fathomable this little quilt became, as the words became fabric!

I am the tides that fall and rise in rhythm to the pull of Moon and Sun, the streams of red moon flow, veins of life echoed in the fragile glimmer of a rainbow and warm subterranean caverns of darkness. Hearing the silent communion and the screams of delight I am the whiteness of mountain heights, and in the cresting waves. I am clouds of strata, cumulus, nimbus flying across land and sea Resisting and surrendering to each transformation of my journey. I am the memory of water.

Figure 35: The Memory of Water 2003 (94x55cms)
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Art, for me, is the mystery itself, as well as being the means to explore the mystery.

All in One
One in All
One in One
All in All

(Anne Judell, 1996 in Voigt, New Visions New Impressions)
I have started to notice visually the spaces between trees as I looked into the surrounding bush. It seemed to be where the action was taking place: birds darted through the spaces, light and shadow played together, and leaves on branches danced with invisible air movements, air brushing against my face gave me the sensation of its form. It was the sensation of being able to see through both eyes, to see both the line of the grid and the spaces so necessary to provide the form; to see the horizon and know it as invisible, imaginary space that brought me to be wholly present for those moments within the landscape. I felt and understood it to be the experience of ‘is-ness’ that defies words.

(Journal entry)

In terms of the seasonal cycle, the final chapter in this inquiry corresponds to the celebrations of Lammas and Mabon, when the seeds are gathered, sorted and stored in readiness for the spring replanting. It is a time for regrouping, intending to rest with the intention and in expectation of a regeneration. From its inception, the intention of this project has been to generate a space for exploring and possibly revealing an auto-chthonic feminist imaginary by considering the relationship between art, creativity and spirituality, and in particular art and perception. I see the process to be a metaphor for what I do daily as woman at the home hearth by bringing order out of chaos in the process of creating. In its original public role, art expresses the relationship between the social order experienced as customs and norms, values and beliefs. It could be said that the artistic imaginary as the symbolic order gives expression to beliefs, by shaping and forming them as norms and values (Gablik 1991, Gottner-Abendroth 1991, Schlain 1991, Grahn 1993, 1998). It is clear that, since the invention of lineal perspective, the grid with its vanishing point has formed the eye of artist and viewer constructing an ‘enframing’ way of seeing and thinking, inherited from Renaissance times. Seeing is learned; we are not only taught and learn the way we see by what we see, what we see patterns our means of perception (Gablik 1991, Sewell 1999, Hockney 2003).

The central focus taken in this inquiry has been the relationship between art and perception as it informs an imaginary of spirituality and creativity by exploring
connections between the symbolic and social order, with the understanding that both are intrinsically interconnected. Through engaging in and reflecting on my own artistic processes, observing other women following their inspirations in workshops and exhibitions, listening to responses, documenting and writing about the many facets of the current inquiry, insights continued to unfold over time, to intermesh and interweave – as they have continued to do in the preparation of this report. Each of these processes originated from the same purpose: to investigate and reveal the possibility of inspiring and finding new ways of seeing. In particular to find ways that might offer in-sights for ways of being that re-cognise the connection between creativity and spirituality: between self as Creator, creating and created, embedded in and embodying the creative process re-cognised as sacred.

Considering the potential human and ecological disasters threatening the planet, there is a need to give birth to an imaginary that ‘compromises’ the old concepts of an beyond-earthly purpose to life, particularly as re-visualised by feminist scholars of religion and culture. The denial of the earlier wisdom traditions in Western cultures, and the continual dismissal by those in power of the traditions of the Indigenous peoples of the world, has precipitated a seeming inability to recognise our inter-subjectivity with Nature in a reciprocal relationship requiring our response-ability towards the whole, including all that is enmeshed in the whole. To renew such a perception there is a need to recognise the power of our creativity as life-giving, as part of the existence of ‘a larger reality sparked by diffuse creativity of which human intelligence is only part’ (Spretnak 1991, p.202). Living in an increasingly globalised world that has the power (not just the potential) to destroy itself ten times over, the need for emergent compromising myths that realign and reclaim a sense of being in a sentient and creational relationship to Earth, (such as those found during this inquiry), provides immanent and pressing motivation to find new ways of seeing, to access new perceptions.
Perspectives and percept-abilities

No unique creative expression that is intentional can be value free as proposed by the notion of a ‘disembodied eye’, a myth perpetuated by the commodification of art (Harding 1983, Gablik 1991). An evolutionary perspective on the history of art shows the progression from the primitive, less pure forms of embodied expression into a mimetic tradition of aesthetics, which lifts the art piece out of the context in which it was created, dissects and analyses its ability to see and faithfully mirror perceived (pre-)existent universal truths, thereby disguising its public function as embeddedness in and embodiment of its original cultural surrounds (Gottner-Abendroth 1991, Battersby 1994). This perspective gave rise to the ideal of pure expression as the ability to see and to faithfully mirror disembodied universal truths, arising in and giving credence to the dichotomies between body and spirit, male and female, Earth and heaven, which continues to reverberate in contemporary discourses on the potential to create, particularly in the area of women’s creative expressions.

In spite of, perhaps ironically because of the rational secularism that continues to inform and feed the development of the modern technocracy, art that does not adhere to, or sits outside the mimetic philosophy and tradition of creativity, offers the space for new revelations (such as Australian Aboriginal art). Such art invites and requires perception at the same time that it presents the possibility for opening ways of seeing to embrace – to create different perceptions. It provides the space for percept-abilities to bloom. In contrast to a mimetic approach, a different visibility occurs through creative acts and responses that arise from a rationality and thoughtful understanding that is informed by intuition, where intuition holds in place the liminal edge that perceives both ‘subthreshold patterns and the emergence of pattern into consciousness’ (Sewell 1999, p.150). In the process of observing patterns through the organic unfolding of observing art, the less visible patterns of disembodied assumptions and beliefs enable transformation through a process of profound interiority (Spretnak 1999, p.205).
By recognising the primal act of consciousness as being the observation of divisible unity, that is, discernment of difference with recognition of the whole fabric, the role of art as public as non-fictional has been to provide a metaphor for the Mystery, at once desirable and fearful, that generates a sense of integrity in a unity that differentiates. The function of creating art may be seen as containing, preserving and revealing the Mystery that is Creation. In proposing that the mapping of meaning happens in relationship of self to place and other, and in the process of sensing oneself in these relationships, the need to engage with one’s perception’s of reality is constantly being called upon. In this inquiry, the visual arts have been the context for such a dynamic. Though being in this process may not necessarily alter personal reality, it does remain possible to alter a reality through the actions that result from re-vis(ual)ing a perception. Patterns of perceiving are thereby altered in the experience, with the possibility of providing a capacity for seeing two patterns at the same time, together forming a wholly new and integrated pattern.

**Engaging in a feminist spiritual aesthetic**

The starting point for the report was a brief review on cultural perspectives to create an opening for percept-ability with a series of questions related to ways of seeing ourselves in the world and in relation to other. Returning to these original considerations, two questions emerge as a means for looking at what we have learned about creativity, spirituality and our sense of self. They form the basis for a deeper look at the specific focal points that have been unfolding during the inquiry through the processes and images to reveal an imaginary for creativity and spirituality engendered auto-chthonically, through an embodied, perceiving consciousness of self in deep relationship with place, such that may be experienced as an indigenous consciousness.

- What do we need to do so that our art forms and ritual events re-cognise, re-vitalise and re-spiritualise, re-vision and re-new the stories which inform symbols and cultural customs that give form to the stories, so that they
again become living motifs of ourselves as participators in, indigenous to the greater order of Creation?

- How did our creativity and re-storying encourage us in directly experiencing and engaging in 'a reversal' of perspectives and perceptabilities, and thereby ways of being physically in place of the Southern Hemisphere; of living in the psycho-spiritual space to re-cognize the possibility for changing the processes that form the beliefs, values and norms and re-create ones that support a new awareness of our ecological embeddedness and interrelatedness with All-that-is-Other?

It is necessary to spiral back to the events that have engaged with these questions, namely the Wheel of the Year celebrated as site of creativity and the quilts created and viewed as integral to the dynamics of the inquiry into these questions. In doing so, and by using the lens of the *vesica piscis*, the focus of the questions becomes clearer, from which to engage with a new vis-ability and respond to new visions, so that the question becomes: what did we see about our creativity and spirituality by taking creative ownership of the Wheel of the Year as embodied template for a non-fictional experiential way of seeing, and in creating and viewing quilts as art?

**The Wheel of the Year: revolutionising perspectives**

The Wheel of the Year is an ancient cultural icon and spiritual practice that when made relevant to place and time as we did in this inquiry, became a powerful phenomenon and image for personal awakening and transformation. As a symbolic map deriving from the physical movements of planet Earth around Sun, the Wheel embodies the passage of time experienced in the processes of birth, growth, death and the regeneration of life. The observation of these processes found embodiment through ritual practice, demonstrating the apparent paradox of change and transformation occurring in continuity and stability, as exemplified by nature and in our bodies.
In this inquiry the journey according the seasonal cycle of the Wheel of the Year has been constantly in the foreground and observed from many perspectives. As a means to stimulate creativity, it has also acted as an interpretive frame for the process of creativity. In my creative process it remains the metaform through which I can incorporate an intimate and transformative relationship with all that is being created, and what may be created on the personal and universal levels. As a meta[ph]oric proforma for reflecting on embodied and conscious responses to creativity as a spiritual experience, working in alignment with the Wheel of the Year has suggested another way of seeing that offers an alternative to the dominant religious and social metaphors for creativity and spirituality. It has expanded an understanding and given opportunity for meaningful responsibility, so that personal acts are seen to be deeply participatory in Earth’s creational journey round Sun. It has been experienced as a living/live model from which to construct an understanding of the process of creativity as sacred interaction with and means for participating in Creation. Through ritual engagement, the Wheel of the Year has been shown to be both an experiential phenomenon for and of creativity and a structural tool by which to inquire into, express and enliven a reversal of perspectives and percept-abilities.

Seeing according to the Wheel of the Year has provided insights and space for revolutionising perspectives, by in-vert-ing, sub-ver-t ing and re-ver-ting. The Latin root from which these words derive simply means ‘to turn’ and resonates with movement and change, and in the context of this inquiry with the Wheel of the Year as we experience ourselves turning through the seasonal changes, and re-ver-t ing to the beginning, the same yet somehow different. Or as we create and view quilts, we enable receptivity to what may be perceived as separate and other, yet the quilt remains the same. That perception as receptivity, which is synonymous with ‘sensitivity and noticing’ as opposed to projection, was evident in the workshops as the women’s relationship with their creative energies blossomed into quilt forms. As intention, it becomes a choice to receive and cultivate an attention that develops desire to be immersed in the dynamic, to
sense the need for change. In the workshops this was experienced as a journey being taken by the imagination to an imaginary that had the power of inverting perspectives that alienate us from our connections to Earth; of subverting beliefs that sacrality resides in an oppositional paradigm and is unattainable; and of reverting to our perceptions of self forming identity in relation to other as sensual experiences of reciprocal beauty. In addition, suggesting a turning, the word ‘revolution’ is associated etymologically with volition, and means to have a will to do something, to simply to think/will again – a simple explanation for the act of imagining something into being through creativity, as the working of magic.

The interrelationship between dark and light is vital to the life-cycle where spaces as places are made visible by the differing relationships between light and dark as the cycle of the Wheel moves through its phases of darkness growing to fullness at winter, then giving way to the light at the effect of Earth’s journey round Sun. Embodied ritual practice revealed spaces in and through which reverse-able vision became possible, providing the opportunity to situate oneself in an inescapable relationship to Earth and other. The conceptual vanishing point on the horizon could disappear, the viewer become enmeshed in the imaginary presented by being in the field surrounded by the horizon, enabling a re-cognition of their inter-relationship. This type of response may be described as ‘syncopic’, an experience that involves a radical change, when we step outside every day experience through an experience in which time is suspended and deep interaction between self and other takes place. Unlike the classic dictionary definition which pathologises such experiences, the experience is one of being truly in place in a way that is fully embodied and deeply relational, space from which one returns and is unable to see the world in quite the same way again. Experiences like these were often part of the Soul Seasons workshops, and were notable at the exhibitions, which were felt as empowerment, perhaps better described as the potential to become.
Quilts enabling percept-abilities

As the visual language of ‘art’, quilts are recognised as belonging to the earliest form of expressing the creative process through differentiation, bringing into form that which is understood through the body as sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. The historical frame from which to view the advent of the contemporary art quilt is that it both continues and challenges traditional expectations regarding form and function. As seen in the re-fabricating exhibitions, the challenge was explored through a new form of narrative, one that is literal and visceral. The art quilts were a new metaform for a metaphor that at once holds constant and suggests a re-viewing of the metaphor of being Creator as woman, mother, sister, in relationship with All-that-is-Other. In doing so, they intrude into reality in ways that blends past and future. These material visions

…not only re-narrate the past but identify a historical location from which to imagine a different future, …by offering a new creative perspective on the past, they enrich our experience of the present, thereby interrupting the seeming momentum of history and enabling us to envision and work toward alternative futures (Stone-Mediatore 2000, p.126).

Taking a strategically located standpoint of exploring and expressing contemporary women's worldviews on creativity and spirituality, in this inquiry the art quilt became an imaginal alternative to fictional distinctions between public and private life, between art and craft, between sacred and profane. The space of tension experienced in both making and viewing the quilts provided an imaginative space in which to register an experience of a disruption of expected discourses, allowing the space in which to recognise that it is not discourse itself but our experience of it, and our reckoning with that experience that initiates discursive change. In the experience, the quilts were not reduced to record simple empirical evidence or reinforce rhetorical constructions. The quilts not only retained their original purpose of nurturing through a long line of historical contexts, in their viewing at the exhibitions they were seen to dissolve the frame that excludes the spectator. They clearly became sites where the fixed gaze gave way to attention as a type of meditational interaction with the world that
demanded the discernment of contradictions in our own experience of the world, thereby facilitating the transformation of perceptions that envelop and involve us.

The process of creating art in the Soul Seasons workshops and perceiving the artworks in the exhibitions has had the effect of revealing the monocular vision that reifies knowledge and the paradigms that hold it in place. It has revealed an imaginary for creativity seen through the twin lenses of quilts as art and the Wheel of the Year re-visioned for the Southern Hemisphere as a cyclic process experienced in tandem with Earth’s creative process. It presents an imaginary that avoids the fictional endeavour that creates out of nothing, and the traditional understanding of ‘pure’ disembodied, objective creative actions, and encourages a participating, embodied consciousness of our role as Creators. Such a viewpoint engages in the hermeneutics of perception that inheres in a subjective process of seeing, one that is cyclical, reciprocal and continuous. Art made and seen from this perspective and constructed by women who have experienced themselves within an economy of the erotic and biophilic by [g]nowing themselves as creative and creational, is a denial of a fictional and disguising perspective. Rather, it has the power to challenge existing ideologies, is subversive and leads to a re-visioning that integrates while it separates from the other in creative acts of shared agency. In their creation and viewing, the quilts break open illusionary perspectives and fictitious stories that can then be re-visioned by the stories we have seen take shape in the women’s art and lives.

In the years that I have been quilting, about 15 in all, the power of quilts – in the making and viewing, giving and receiving, has become increasingly convincing. This project has brought the realisation to life. I have both experienced and witnessed the process of making a quilt, a process that provides a subjective resource for pursuing alternative viewpoints, for seeing from and through the construction of another framework without the need to be directly oppositional. Even when opposing blocks or colours are used, they are done so in order to complement and enhance. Quilts are made for many reasons and have many
purposes. Not only do they keep us warm, they have the properties of allowing us to feel comfortable and comforted by covering our bodies at every stage of our life’s journey, from birth to death. They decorate and beautify our lives, either on beds or on walls. They tell stories about self and other, to self and other, stories that are relational, made on many levels, with many voices. There is the story of the maker, about the personal influences experienced in the making, the techniques involved to elicit the desired effects, the fabrics used and the way they have been put together. This is one level of relationship. The other relationship is with the receiver, the viewers who brings their own historical perspective with all that it implies, so that the quilt may tell another story.

Quilts have also presented narratives of women’s often ‘obscured experiences of resistance’, thereby offering personal storytelling that can contribute to social and community consciousness and awareness (the AIDS quilts in the USA is one well-publicised example). Nevertheless, colonising art narratives and the dominant perceptions of an abstract aesthetics can often obscure voices and narratives until they are brought together and re-told as part of a communal voice. The act of creating and being in co-creation with the quilts in the re-fabricating exhibitions has given the artworks the power of voice, where they became the space for critical reflection, for introspection and dialogue. This space of relationship between the quilts, their creators and the responders’ own perceptions allowed the ability to hear the call to re-think the stories told of our own worlds and experiences, which relied on a way of seeing that is more than the ‘mirroring of available discourses by using a simple empiricist presentation that flattens the experience into evidence’ (Stone-Mediatore 2000). It offered the space where embodied, visceral experience can contend with discursively constructed perceptions of the ‘already’ perceived, and where another, different, perhaps more subjective perspective outside hegemonic discourse could be approached and experienced.
At each stage of the inquiry, a participatory way of seeing was called into consciousness, inviting a redirection of our gaze from inherited viewing-points, and creating multidimensional perspectives from which to renew and enliven multiple capacities for perception. As an active challenge to dominant ways of seeing and epistemologies that privilege certain knowledges and ways of acquiring them, the acts of creating quilts and viewing them has provided the opportunity to become more conscious of submerged mythologies that we live as a culture, that shape our behaviour, feelings and thoughts. The quilts have invited direct engagement with a deeply relational awareness, bringing a consciousness that is embodied personally at the same time as connections are formed with the collective imaginary experienced in community. Taken from this perspective, where subjective and objective realities meld as co-creational, it becomes clear that cultural forms are indeed open to change by this means, as are intellectual and emotional, physical and spiritual orientations to the place in which we take our being and are becoming.

**Making the gap visible through embodied experience**

Participating in the ritual context of creating with the seasons of the Wheel of the Year, we saw the making of art as participating in our realities, while offering the possibility of changing them through attentiveness to acts of perception that were often mutually shared and received. We were attentive to the relational perspective of being inescapably part of our environment, in which our deep connectedness to self and other was revealed as multiple reinforcing webs of interdependent relations through stories shared and artworks. Such a perspective or percept-ability had the effect of drawing us *into* the metaphorical and meta[ph]ormic horizon in a way that we could feel ourselves being embraced by it; unlike the fictional linear, single perspective which promotes a depth of field that is conceptually infinite, externalises the goal and excludes the viewer from the space, resulting in an alienating imaginary. A relational perspective experienced as the seasonal rites of creativity according to the Wheel of the
Year, evoked a sense of self as belonging to the environments that we inhabit –
to Earth as our home, and all that is in it as our ‘neighbour’.

As we observed the changing patterns in nature from the perspective of the
Wheel of the Year and practised it in ritual according to the cycle for the Southern
Hemisphere, the physical and emotional responses required and emerging were
experienced as an active, embodied attention to all aspects of relationship. As a
facet of percept-ability in my own daily life, in preparing symbols and ritual for the
workshops, it was experienced as deep relationality with self in place. The ability
to be fully attentive is a learned skill, endogenous attention being the thrown-
ness to select according to expectations, familiar patterns of perception, habitual
assumptions and stereotypic viewpoints. I noticed times in the workshops when
interference by an already perceived northern hemispheric perspective formed
‘blocks’, such as when a mother celebrated her son’s birthday as a Halloween
birth, when in fact he was born in Australia, at Beltane. In the space of tension
between the already known and yet-to-be-perceived reciprocating interactions
occur, providing a space for perceptions to crystallize or dissolve as mutually
informing through seeing the space of the gap. It was found that making quilts in
ritual process, engaging a dynamic and embodied attention had the capacity to
alter subjective reality. The creative visualizations that were part of the ritual in
the Soul Seasons workshops required being open to relating to visual story found
in imagination and linked to memory, where new visions for creative endeavours
and perceptions of reality could be experience in blending memories past with
future possibilities. Through their narratives, the quilts in exhibition demanded
such an attentive response, a care-fullness in which all of the senses became
enhanced as in a meditational trance, in which a receptivity was fostered that
could best be described as an erotic and life-honouring desire to be fully attentive
to the experience by entering into the act of creational magic with the quilts.
Creativity as interactive, relational, boundless

As we journeyed with the seasons, creating quilts in the workshops, we became more attentive to another facet that the creative process facilitated, particularly in the process of relationships with self and other. Being engaged in shared interactions allowed us to register an attention and sensitivity to, an awareness of our mutual causality. In the act of creating our artworks we were creating our perceptions of self in relation to other, not only with a sense of shared concerns, but feeling safe to ‘peer around the culturally conditioned lens and step out of a culturally induced trance’. In a meta[ph]ormic process, what was before unseen can be felt viscerally, become visible and given form. This type of receptivity affects both inner and outer landscapes in cyclic procession, where self is seen deeply embedded in inter-subjectivity with all that is other. It is a process that is ‘iterative, like leaves falling and buds bursting’ and gives rise to a sense of seamless ‘unbroken experience’, an ease and comfort at being in our place in the world (Sewell 2000, p.119 -120). On many occasions, in workshops and the exhibitions and in my own reflective space, these moments of recognition traversed time and space, where present memory integrated the past and the future. For example, a regular participant at the workshops made a major perceptual change about being in place through connecting a memory of the harvest celebrated in autumn that was part of the Church liturgy in her childhood in Adelaide. Our dislocation from religious and ideological traditions inherited from northern hemispheric traditions has given us the opportunity to reconsider the timeliness of observing festivals and rituals. How appropriate is it, for example, to celebrate festivals of rebirth, such as Easter and the Chinese Spring Moon festival in March, the season of autumn when the die-back of Earth’s vegetation begins – or to festoon our houses with symbols of snowmen, sleds and reindeer in the height of summer in Australia?

The works created in the workshops and for the exhibitions often contained and were informed by memories, where remembering emerges from a memory that is open to what is happening (Irigaray 1992). Many of the re-fabricating quilts
recalled and recorded understandings and insights gained in the life cyclic through experiences of birth, life, death and the rebirth, which had resulted in a deeper unfolding of self in relationship to family and community. As visual narratives their quilts invited active conversation, provided the space for viewers to reflect and be empowered, inviting them to see without a fixed field of vision. In espousing a concept of creativity that is interactive and relational with All-that-is-Other, artificial barriers between art and life are made visible. The space is open for a communication that ‘entrains’ by bringing into harmony that which has been split off and separated from in the process of naming or mythologising, so that the creative relationship is maintained and the undisguised public role of art overrides the fictional divisions that create an elitist, exclusionary metaphor of art. Such art can never be artificially disassociated from social action ‘because it is itself the centre of that action’ (Gottner-Abendroth 1991, p. 84) The quilts at all stages of their creation provided the opportunity for a conversation where the language spoken is that which Ursula LeGuin refers to as the ‘native’ tongue, the liminal form of communication that works on a level subliminal to words, and allows the possibility for multiple readings that overlap, interweave and entrain, that keeps it and the viewer in becoming (Irigaray 1992). In particular, the quilts seen in the gallery during each of the re-fabricating exhibitions entered into a form of social action at the level of community. It is expected that they, together with my series for the Wheel of the Year for the Southern Hemisphere, will continue to inform perceptions as they are viewed here.

Similarly, a spirituality practised as embodied and relational does not fit into a disguising and fictional patriarchal paradigm, because it is not ‘denatured’ – it is creative in the most literal and physical sense of the word. The structures in nature observed by means of the seasons are the basic patterns of the human imagination for expressing the divine in creation, and form the basis for an autochthonic feminist aesthetic, that might ultimately be considered a sense of self participating in a creativity that is innate to Earth, innate to ourselves and thereby re-establish our ecological connections to All-that-is-other. The realisations
echoed by the women’s voices in describing their creative processes experienced in creating quilts illustrated an understanding that their creative acts are a spiritual expression of themselves, arising in relationship and embedded in the cycles within their lives. This awareness was also seen to inscribe an orientation that relied on personal authority and an emerging consciousness of the creative process as immanently performative, deepening the percept-ability of existing in co-creation of All-that-is-Other. Though often openly discussed in the group, creativity, aesthetics and spirituality were mediated by inner [g]nowing, clearly linked by an authoritative sense of a personal, creative involvement in Creation. However it may have been expressed, there was evident recognition that the artworks were a grounded and embodied expression of the creative Mystery, situated in the practicalities of everyday life.

From such a perspective, daily acts become a celebration of creativity as a sacralising act of spiritual consciousness, experienced as care and life flourishing through relationship with others, the landscape and with personal environments. Many of the quilts in the exhibitions related to women’s lives, family, work, and life’s passages, some in sadness, others in joy and celebration; some in celebration of others, while there were those that sought a deeper knowledge of self. The quilts also celebrated the quest for beauty in relationship, which when seen from the perspective of deep relationality, gave evidence of a desire for the aestheticism of society that is founded on an understanding of beauty as non-fictional and biophillic. In her description of an engaged perception of a landscape, Laura Sewell could have been describing the experience others or I have in the making of a quilt, entering imaginal space, or the way the quilts were perceived: ‘Soften your eyes, let your attention be wide... Listen, and then soak in colour, and feel texture with your eyes... Let your care roam over the landscape.’ In landscapes of the psyche, as in the physical observation of the seasons on the Wheel of the Year for the, neurological networks and patterns provide the schemata that automatically determine the categorization of visual input. Although consideration of physiology
is outside the parameters of this inquiry, it is fortunate to realise that the plasticity of neural pathways, allows us flexibility to create an embodied re-cognition of what we may have come to know as a fixed system of perceiving, resulting in not only being able to see the world from a different perspective, but in doing so to create the world differently, so that through a cultivated attention to

…making beauty in our daily acts…duty becomes desire, received as a gift, returned as a gesture… wrapped in the sensations of beauty running through the body (Sewell, 1999, p.120).

A dynamic process and a cyclic perspective

The relationship between psyche, body and landscape inheres in all my work as I creatively journey through these meta[ph]ormic landscapes. Though I rarely go anywhere (the quilts have travelled in exhibitions), I do travel to the ‘inner world’ during the process of creating the quilts, without the expectation of reaching a final destination, a conclusion, or closure. Although the quilts take a final form, I know that both in their creation and interpretation, they will shape-shift, as do I in the process of creating them. The quilts created and viewed in this inquiry have revealed a perspective that is dynamic and cyclic – meta[ph]ormic. It is a perspective that re-cognises both the personal and collective power of an imaginary, that unifies while it is situated in diversity, where the erotic life-force is the central force for a creativity that is transforming. In making and viewing quilts we were participating in a collective dynamic process that has defined a feminist creative aesthetic as representing immanence and interconnectedness, where the impact of the quilts on perceptions of reality was such that it could not be finally objectified or commodified (as, for example, in Robert Hugh’s interpretation of the quilts of the Amish). Interpretation and evaluation took place between the participants – the creators and their creations, the quilts and their spectators. A space is found for a perception of creativity that gives rise to a spirituality and ontology that do not represent power as hierarchical control over through lineal progressions or the implementation of controlling ideologies.
In re-visioning our relationship to the Wheel of the Year for the place in which we live in the Southern Hemisphere, we breathed life into physical and psychic perceptions of our life on Earth, envisaged as a cycle in the sacred process of Creation in which all participate collectively. The psycho-spiritual experience is the ‘invisible’ aspect of the external natural cycle, where the making of art results not in a simple abstract representation, but expresses externally what has been referred to as a quality of ‘a pre-existing inner structure’, by which all are simultaneously authors and spectators participating in Creation (Gottner-Abendroth 1982, p.83). If the cyclic process of cognitive creation is formed by entraining other ideas and visible patterns that affect neural pathways to consciousness, the visual image as meta[ph]ormic is not simply a static, rigid container, but implies a cyclic interaction between it as metaphor and as metaform for the construction of perception that is the ordering of the world through recognizing differentiation and relationship. Iconography, be it story or image, is not simply an abstract representation, it is and becomes what it represents (Grahn 1993). The collective imaginary provided by the quilts in exhibition and the creative inspirations explained by the artists were received in multiple ways by visitors and in doing so provided a connecting bridge for the creation of a ‘future aesthetics that is sourced in the past, expressed differently according to context and is not complete in itself’ – but continues as a dynamic interaction between quilt and viewer (Gottner-Abendroth 1982, p.81-3).

The quilts I created in personal observation the Earth’s cycle provided me with the awareness of the constant dynamic of finding my creative self through the cycle of being as becoming, through continual dynamic interaction with my surroundings and my inner self to creatively bring order out of chaos. To use Bronwyn Davies’ term, the quilts ‘(in)-scribe’ the landscape for me and my developing awareness of being in dynamic relationship with it. Davies refers to her perceptions of ‘body/landscape relations in which bodies are understood as taking up their material existence within landscapes, and as landscapes.’ The concept of (in)scription is developed as texts written on the deep/surfaces of the
body/landscape, not in the sense of scarifying but in the sense of bringing the subject into being. That being is understood in terms of process rather than in terms of essence, and as such is ‘motile, fluid, open to change’ (2002, p.11).

Women in the workshops found that creating in tandem with the seasonal cycles provided the possibility of seeing beyond dichotomous separations when experiencing the interrelatedness of the tonalities of dark and light, shape and texture in our quilt making that resonated with the external environment. Through the ritual practice we visited the stages in the cycles of Creation in the process of our own creativity. The workshop participants experienced and gave expression to the Mystery that is the process of creation as both the metaphor and metaform, subjective and objective reality, without need for rejection of one for the other. We found that ritualising experience provided the tools for careful discernment of the relationship with that which is being created: a resonance between the giver and receiver, performed in the inner world of the individual through interaction with the outer world of the group in ritual setting. Ritual is nothing less than an imaginal, magical experience, which is continued visually in the art works created in the workshops.

**Creativity as transformative ritual**

Arising in the imagination that is grounded in the experience of the seasonal cycles, creating art has been experienced as performative of magic in the Soul Seasons workshops held over the period of the research. The workshops were seen to be a transforming process performed in creating ritual through placing ourselves at the centre of an imaginary that we were creating. As we became more and more sensible to our personal and common perceptions and needs, the women became excited in anticipation of the next seasonal celebration, perhaps as much of the ritual circle as of the opportunity to work with their loved fabrics. One may ask: why not simply teach the multifarious applications of various blocks and techniques? Why sit in a ritual circle and perform esoteric liturgy, especially in a textile craft workshop? After all, skills can be taught and
learned, self-taught out of a driving passion. Is it possible to remain connected to the advent and gift of creative passion that inspires, alive to the sense of involvement in the creative transformation that is perceptual change? It was clear that the ritual circle provided the space in which participants acknowledged and gave expression to an embodied and empowering experience of self as the source of their creativity. Indeed, the sense of creative energy was palpable in the workshops: works in progress were inspired towards completion by transformative self-insights and the passion of others; ‘creative blocks’ were transformed and personal transformations became embedded in the fabrications. These transforming processes are inherent as the ritual of the creative process itself, in this case made visible by the creative cycle of the Wheel of the Year.

After having been discouraged in my youth to take up a career in art owing to my gender and seeming lack of imagination, my own creative practice as artist and teacher of the creative process has been a process of slowly uncovering a sense of myself as inherently creative, experienced metaphorically and in tandem with seasonal cycles. It has been a process of bringing myself to a deeper understanding of self-in-place, embedded place. The psychic integration of this understanding is given expression in my life by re-cognising my celebration of the cyclic seasonal changes on the Wheel of the Year as tangible, embodied expression as participating in Creation as it visibly unfolds through my creative expressions. In this way, I see creativity as ritualized spiritual expression, where ritual provides the opening for movement through the spectrum, from one state of consciousness, which may manifest as inability to be creative, to a more desirable state of consciousness by the engagement of imagination and vision, experiential knowledge and will. Ritual comes out of and gives rise to the place of imagination, which, when done with deliberate and conscious attention, such as in the creation of a quilt, enhances the understanding of personal experiences of creativity as special, even sacred.
Perceiving creativity as spirituality

During the course of the inquiry, I was constantly aware of underlying fears of talking about spirituality and creativity in the same breath, particularly in the public context of the four re-fabricating exhibitions. Although the themes for each exhibition had been provided, I was unwilling to revisit existing perceptions, impose or suggest other parameters for what is ‘intangible and open to debate’ (Drury and Voigt, 1999). My perception of spirituality in art practice was very personal, as explained in Chapter 5, and relates to the dimension of consciousness that seeks to directly interact with the fundamental Mystery as it is experienced in the process of creating. In the workshops, I was aware of the many differences in relating to the spiritual that the women lived by, yet by stepping into the space of the gap offered as self-created ritual for the seasons, spirituality came personally alive through engaging all the senses, fostering insights in the process of realising their creative energies. The experiences described by the visitors responding to the works in exhibition was another way of re-imaging the divine in our world, seemingly akin to ‘the art experience’ described by Christa Sanders she walks into a gallery, as an experience of being in mutual communion, in which the everyday and time is suspended (Chapter 4). In the process of making my own quilts, I can come closer to a sense of participating in the Mystery that is called ‘divinity’, and that what I create is a divine expression. In teaching creativity through my spiritual practice of observing the seasonal cycles I have slowly come to [g]now and own my auto-chthonic Creator-self through a deepening understanding of self-in-place, an understanding that spirals with the seasons (Chapter 5). In the exhibitions, the quilts seemed to open up a channel for a spiritual sensibility of participating in reciprocal creation, demonstrated by the reactions they elicited that often showed openness to the spaces provided in the viewing – where the metaphorical vanishing point of conventional perspectives disappeared and meta[ph]ormed into visions embedded in the natural cycles of embodied relational perceptions. With the recognition of quilts as art comes the experience of a creativity and spirituality that is immanent, in which authority is mediated by an inner [g]nowing
that relies on perceptions of these sacred and sacralising acts of creativity as grounded and embodied, situated in the practicalities of everyday life (Chapter 4, Part 2).

The research revealed an intense sense of self as participating in the greater Creation; it acknowledged my sense of that through the innate creativity of the female body, symbolized by the vulva, the creativity of which not only mirrors but gives meaning to the workings of the Cosmos and gives birth to a growing sense of my self as embodying the sacred through creational acts in relation to place. No matter what the ontological connection between individual woman and Goddess as cosmological deity, archetypal symbol or embodying a feminist ideology, the Goddess metaphor used creatively and holistically in this inquiry engaged with the politics of the meta[ph]ormic process, revealing and creating alternative mythologies to the patriarchal discourses of dominance that for millennia have informed creativity and spirituality. In ritual space, Goddesses were the lenses for giving witness to self-as-woman and women as creators, manifest in her body through the cyclic phases of conceiving and giving birth, nurturing life, giving over in death for a re-generation. As a thread stitching the layers of the inquiry together, Goddess has been imagined, storied and related to as the cyclic triple embodiment of woman as Maiden, Mother, Crone, experienced and envisaged as direct embodiment of Earth’s creative cycle and women’s own physical and emotional lives.

As psycho-spiritual archetype for contemporary women (and men who choose) Goddess as Earth and Cosmos was seen to be a living symbol with power to perform cognitive and social functions that affect our bodies and psyches in ways both conscious and unconscious. As imagery used in the workshops, (Swinging Bridges 1983, Gadon 1990, Iglehart Austen 1990, Graham 1997), Goddess as ‘She of Ten Thousand Names’ helped myself and others to experience an arcane reverence for woman as divine among Creation, and envision Her embodied in self and each other in the process of taking hold of our full strength, physical,
emotional, psychological, honouring our unique ‘biophilic’ experiences of being woman. The diversity of interpretations available within and arising from these images of Goddesses provided the ground for the making of art and the telling of story as expressions of sacred relationships recreated today from antiquity. During the course of the research I found myself growing in recognition not only of the phases of the triple Goddess, but deepening my recognition of the plethora of ‘Goddess’ attributes awakened by my reading and the images. I saw as my own attributes, experienced at different times and in different situations. The re-emergence of the femality of the Creative Dynamic as the meta[ph]ormic process acknowledging the complex patterns encompassed by women’s physical and psycho-spiritual experiences that could in fact be visualized as many more than the conventional triple-phase Goddess.

The witness given by other women during ritual times in the workshops helped to uncover the dominating fictional stories by re-connecting past with present and future, gliding over centuries and millennia of monocular vision that has enshrined an ontology out of this world and constructed personal and communal identity through perspectives that divide and dominate. Goddess imagery and the use of our personal symbols of the sacred helped us to disrupt the colonising and dominating masculinist, necrophilic symbolic, ‘freeing the imagination to generate alternative myths, symbols and world-views’ (Jantzen 1998, p.124). Goddess helped us redraw the boundaries, to resituate our woman-bodies in a sacred space that conformed to the boundaries we each had drawn for ourselves (Raphael 1993). We learned the inherent power of symbols as being much more than the name suggests. The process of re-imagining symbols in our ritual circles, while a personal act, was also a social and political act of transformation for self and other, in which we re-cognised our part in affirming the meta[ph]ormic process they represented by embodying it in our textile creations. As a feminist re-imagining, our symbols had the power to break open traditional ways of imagining divinity and sacrality as remote, unearthly and unattainable by virtue of our embodiment – finding a process for understanding the sacred as women
They are always available to us through our imaginations. Though my creative works do not always visibly include Goddess imagery, much of the inspiration for individual quilts and for the techniques taught in the workshops derived from an understanding of Goddess represented by women’s cycles as life giver, nurturer and destroyer, revealed through imagery and symbol at particular points of time in my life. In transposing images and mythologies inherited from my ancestors and associating them with the southern seasonal cycle, both in quilts and in ritual functions during the workshops, I came to know the self-that-is Other as Goddess and Creator.

**Making an auto-chthonic feminist creative imaginary visible**

This inquiry has had at its core the visual media, in particular the art quilt. Interaction with artworks involves perception in a revolving and evolving relationship between three parties who create the work: the artist, the audience and the artwork, the latter being the focus from which to access and assess these interactions. The interaction provides the opportunity for the disruption or continuance of discourses that form the various aspects of ‘grand narratives’ of creation and creator, spirituality and divinity. Seen from this perspective, it is an interaction, a dialectic that leaves space for multiple interpretations, that when shared have the potential to change perspectives already encoded into culture. It gives witness to and in its own unique way answers the need for what can be seen as a *female*, although feminine aesthetic (Battersby 1984, Gablik 1991). It also provides access to the principles of a matriarchal or matristic aesthetic as theorised by Heidi Gottner-Abendroth (1991). It is an imaginary for creativity as a spirituality that embraces embeddedness in nature, inclusion of the other, and realisation of self through inter-subjectivity that is not posited as oppositional, and is not a denatured, disguising ideology that divides theory from form, whereby both are abstracted. Woven into these themes for a feminist aesthetic are perceptions of spirituality arising in process, experienced as embedded in nature, and embodied by experiences that are relational (Christ 2003). The public role of art (unlike the fictional and denatured) situates it at the centre of complex social
action with the ability to shape life and so change it. In setting out my personal schemata for a contemporary aesthetic framework, situated in the imaginal and the physical lives of women (and men) who participated in the project, I have also embraced the proposition for an imaginary that emerges from and envisions matrifocal Goddess mythology and gives story to an erotic desire for life through the process of Irigaray’s *écriture feminine* using quilts as a medium. Quilt making and exhibiting quilts have been given a public role in this inquiry, where they speak eloquently to such an aesthetic. The patterns emerging from the data gathered from the exhibitions, the workshops and my own process of creating quilts stitch the layers together to describe/inscribe an imaginary for cultural change where creativity and spirituality link hands, where both en-vision and give expression to a feminist creative imaginary deriving from a deeply sentient relationships between self, place and other.

The inquiry has challenged the invisiblised modernist perspective of art as completely autonomous, revealed by the disconnection between the aesthetic and the social. A feminist perspective of creativity as an auto-chthonic spirituality is achieved through a percept-ability that provides visibility and vision by looking through the space of the gap, symbolized in this inquiry by the *vesica piscis*, which has been visualised as opening to the invisible place where the creative initiates in darkness. From the viewing point of the gap provided by the overlapping of two circular lenses a new vision for spirituality and creativity can come into view, shift in focus, be re-focused and experienced in multiple and renewable ways, from which consciousness can be experienced in multiple ways as a perceiving mind/spirit parthenogenetically unfolding. A communion between belief and practice is enabled when derived from meaningful personal insights and experiences, as was seen in the rituals enacted according to our personal interactions with the creative Wheel of the Year. In various ways, through the processes engaged in this inquiry, we found that we were uncovering, revealing and embracing the heart of the paradox that is Creation, through being and
becoming, through dieing and renewing as we made our own quilts or viewed the perceptions of other women in their quilts.

Likewise, the inquiry has challenged dominating discourses on ways of seeing creativity and spirituality in relation to personal subjectivity for contemporary women, by leaving the way open for multiple viewings that may result in multiple perceptions rather than homogenising viewpoints into a static and inflexible imaginary. During all stages of the inquiry, as I watched, thought about, responded and listened to the wisdoms being offered I had the sense of boundaries collapsing, themes and ideas coalescing and separating, as colours and tones blend and separate in putting the blocks of a quilt together to form patterns that may be coming from and in-forming a perspective that gives visibility to the multivalent quality of a feminist imaginary for creativity and spirituality. The patterns that emerged revealed the stories and narratives of the many women participating over the period of the research have given shape to the vision of an imaginary as witnessed and made visible by women who found deep sense of self unfolding through their creative acts and giving witness to those of others. They showed identity as gendered embodiment, arising and evolving in relationship to others, in place and as part of the Earth community; identity gained from being involved in sacred acts; identity arrived at through cyclic and reciprocal ways of knowing and enlivened by sense of spiritual connection to self-as-Other in co-creation.

These realisations present a new aesthetic framework, foster a new aesthetic model in which the sacred role played by art in creation becomes visible because it emerges from an embodied reciprocal relationship to the world as Other. In such an imaginary, creativity and spirituality are fundamentally and dynamically relational and subjective experiences; they intrude into the given space of ‘reality’ as inter-subjective and located beyond the fictional. Through such a perspective, the experiences of spirituality and creativity remain alive, as living acts of imagination that is contextualized, thereby avoiding arbitrary objectivity or
subjective sentimentality so that action is more than personal catharsis (Gottner-Abendroth 1991). Creating in ritual space meant that the artificial barrier between art and life could be broken down, and reconstructed as the complex set of social interactions that informed our creativity. In the space of the gallery, meaning was constructed and re-constructed many times by observer spectators, who derived meaning by being in interaction with what they observed. This moves art and perception beyond the purely aesthetic, beyond the vision of static autonomy, to where the observer and the observed merge to form another vision, where the audience is actively constitutive. The inquiry gives witness to and celebrates a biophillic ethic revealed as a cycle of ‘re-births’, in which the erotic is the driving value that constructs beliefs and norms. Each of these qualities overrides exclusionist constructions of art and returns the public function of art to its original ability to shape and change an ideology, as it does not enter into the fictional and disguising ideology that divides theory from form, thereby de-naturing, de-humanising and de-sacralising the creative process.

Experience of an auto-chthonic feminist creative imaginary can be found, as can be seen in this inquiry, through finding the sacred within the Earth, within the self in re-creating rites of passage and transformation, and within ancient and archetypal mythologies being recreated in the present. We found that applying these experiences and understandings within the context of the Wheel of the Year gave insights to the potentialities of human awareness – a sacred potentiality inherent and innate to all human beings, expressing a spirituality that is meta[ph]ormic and therefore transformative, one that is deeply creational of self and Other. In this way experience of the sacred through and in creativity is an embodied, deeply sensual sensation of making meaning, repeatedly, excitedly, passionately, whilst remaining gripped by the Mystery as it unfolds, revolves, spirals back in on itself through the constant and ever-changing creative rituals of desire, fertile creation and resolution. The witness given by the women creating and the artworks themselves embodied this realization and understanding, when as creators and viewers we stepped into the space they
provided by their own embeddedness in the process of representing and re-
creating in reciprocal relationship. The quilts embodied a perspective and offered
the space for renewing visions for a world in which the structures of relationships
may be seen from a different perspective – as non-heirarchical and interrelated,
interconnected and reciprocal. In this context, both works and viewers can be
seen as agents of change, offering an ethos of flourishing natality that directs
human endeavours arising from a biophilic imaginary (Jantzen1998).

The inquiry has revealed that what we see continually updates and informs the
imagination. The movement between internal and external ‘landscapes’ or stories
through the interaction between vision and imagination has been seen to draw
focus to, and possibly shift one’s horizon of perception of self and other, where
the horizon is an archetype for the space between past and future. Depending on
the quality of our experiential percept-abilities, the self is continually transformed
by the act of seeing. It can be seen that during the course of the inquiry
participants in their own ways operated simultaneously on the levels of emotional
identification, theoretical reflection and symbolic action, melding thinking, feeling
and doing to give form to a concrete mythological image in the works created and
viewed. In doing so, multiple creative acts have occurred that have
meta[ph]ormically and magically intruded into reality by changing psychic and
social reality – an experience of the spiritual intruding into the material
experienced in direct embodied relationship as Earth’s creative process through
the Wheel of the Year in the Southern Hemisphere. In re-cognising in my own
practice and giving witness to the creative processes of others, I am mindful that
we are finding ways to re-imagine the divine in the world, a capacity that has
been revealed through the emergence of an imaginary of divine creation that
honours embodiment and embeddedness in nature, reciprocal relationality,
inseparably connected in and through the process. Art and art making as part of
this process mediates between the invisible spirit world and the visible body of
Nature at the liminal juncture, for those who have eyes to see.
EPILOGUE

After the research came to an end, the *re-fabricating* exhibitions continued to be held, initially annually then every second year, with thanks to sponsorship of the City of the Blue Mountains, which provided funding in collaboration with the NSW Council for the Arts through the Cultural Partnership Program on three occasions, in 2004, 2006, 2008. These exhibitions have also received in kind support from Ozquilt Network Inc and the NSW Quilters’ Guild Inc. Art quilters from all areas of Australia have sent work in response to curatorial themes that were set by myself in consultation with the committee of ‘re-fabricating networks for textile artists Inc’, to whom I am grateful for their continuing support in producing the exhibitions.

- 2003 *re-fabricating enchantment*
- 2004 *re-fabricating relationships*
- 2006 *re-fabricating difference*
- 2008 *re-fabricating environments*

I see the exhibitions as continuing to open the space, explore and provide a visible interface with perceptions that began to be revealed in the first four initiating exhibitions. The qualities identified as informing the four exhibitions held during this inquiry have continued to spiral through those that followed, and when seen outside the lineal frame, cycling through a process, they affirm perspectives on spirituality and creativity that

- celebrate and affirm femaleness as biophilic
- effect a sense of self in relation to place: (be-)longing
- realise self in mutually reciprocal relationship to others
- honour multiplicity in experience of diversity in unity
- see time as multifaceted: past in present in future
- recognise change as a process in becoming
- sense participation in the creative process
- know the creative process as sacred and sacralising
- seek beauty
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APPENDICES

A CREATIVE IMAGINARY FOR PERSONAL & CULTURAL CHANGE
EXPLORED THROUGH A FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY
AND WOMEN’S TEXTILE ART
By
ANNABELLE MADELEINE SOLOMON

A thesis presented to the University of Western Sydney
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The four *re-fabricating exhibitions*, &
‘*The Wheel Turns*’ - quilts for the Southern Hemisphere

It is hereby acknowledged that attribution of copyright to the images presented in this document is held by the artists themselves; that acknowledgment of authorship of each image is provided with the permission of each artist; and that permission was obtained for such use in the research project.
A guide to viewing the exhibitions

The following presentation of the re-fabricating exhibitions provides the viewer with the opportunity to negotiate several ways to visually experience the works of the artists. The exhibiting artists are listed in alphabetical order in the Artist Directory for each of the exhibitions. By clicking on the names of the artists in each Directory, the viewer is linked to images of the works and Creation Stories. A return to each exhibition is accessed through THE EXHIBITIONS link available on each slide.

An image of the full quilt is provided for each artist, together with title and size of the work; a detail of the work may also be available, accessed by means of the main image. The artist’s personal CREATION STORY provided by the text that accompanies the image, can be found linked to the name of the artist. To return to the main image and exhibition sequence, click on the small image that accompanies the Creation Story.

In order to gain an overall impression of the exhibitions and allow personal response to the works, a preview of each exhibition is recommended, after which the reader is encouraged to access the images and Creation Stories in conjunction with the discussion of the art works as it unfolds in Chapter 4. The Wheel Turns is an exhibition of quilts created during the period of the research from the perspective of the Southern Hemisphere, which can be viewed in tandem with my experience of the creative process as it is explored in Chapter 5.
Artist Directories for the Exhibitions

#1: re-fabricating our memories ~ 1999

#2: re-fabricating the future ~ 2000

#3: re-fabricating our lives ~ 2001

#4: re-fabricating indigenous spirit ~ 2002

#5: The Wheel Turns

Quilts for the Wheel of the Year in the Southern Hemisphere
re-fabricating

our memories

11 June - 4 July 1999
Braemar Gallery
Springwood NSW

An exhibition of Australian women’s contemporary textile art
curated by Annabelle Solomon
We are our past and the future belongs to those who remember. Our work expresses truths that are beyond time and space, recalling ancient images and awakening memories within ourselves and our psyches which uplift and celebrate the human spirit.

Memories form layers, building upon each other, and offer us the opportunity to discard or re-route the journey by which we find ourselves and our place in the world.

We are a patchwork of memories.
#1: Directory of exhibiting artists

- Heather Bloor
- Yvonne Chapman
- Gillian Hand
- Wendy Holland
- Dianne Jones
- Deb Leake
- Penny Seta
- Annabelle Solomon
- Jo Steele
- Helen Toner
- Denise Trent
- Sue Wademan
YVONNE CHAPMAN

Vessel of Dreams and Memories

CREATION STORY
GILLIAN HAND

I was not always able to go with the flow

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
GILLIAN HAND

Infamatory Remarks

CREATION STORY
WENDY HOLLAND

Intimate Proximity

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
WENDY HOLLAND

Distant Intimacy

CREATION STORY
DIANNE JONES

Corrugations 1:
the spaces between

CREATION STORY
DIANNE JONES

Corrugations 2: flow through

CREATION STORY
DIANNE JONES

The Lolly Quilt

CREATION STORY
DEB LEAKE
‘Past Lives’ Wagga
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
PENNY SETA
Night
CREATION STORY
PENNY SETA
Day
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
ANNABELLE SOLOMON

Flag of the Gaian Republic

CREATION STORY
ANNABELLE SOLOMON

Ages of Woman: Maiden, Mother, Crone

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
JO STEELE

Embroiderer’s Totem 1 & 2

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
JO STEELE

Odyssey in Transparency

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
HELEN TONER

Raft

CREATION STORY
SUE WADEMAN

Unravelled

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
I was blind but now I see

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
END

Click here to return to
the Directory of Exhibiting Artists
I finally found ‘it’ in thread painting. No other medium or technique has satisfied me quite like this. I’ve always made things - a hands-on person. I’ve drawn, painted, used clay, wax-resist, sculpted puppet heads, cast in plaster and latex, sewn fabric into costumes, clothes, decorations, furnishings, wall and bed quilts, made masks with papier-mache, dabbled with street theatre, made cloth dolls, screen-printed and used linocuts for printing. I like the process of making things!

In the three years that I’ve predominantly been sewing my pictures I’ve been working on a personal series from photographic images of my life - images that I feel deeply connected to, even if at the time I can’t explain the connection. I’ve discovered that the meaning emerges over time, and is full of surprising revelation. It’s been an energetic search, and my paths have traversed many different arenas, until I found ‘myself’ where I never planned to go! My artistic creations have always thrived on flexibility, mistakes and discovery - courage to try new things. The results are personally very satisfying.

The unexpected turning point of finding the truth of Jesus continues to inspire and guide me, and my life has never been so fulfilling. *Truth Revealed in Jesus* aims to portray the deep spiritual love and peace of that relationship. The series continues.
During the autumn of 1996, fragments of memories from my European childhood and early life kept popping up quite strongly. Vivid images in dreams were also trying to tell me their story. Trusting in my intuition, I felt I had to respond to them and give them some reflection.

Over the past years I had flown back to Holland to visit my mother who had become ill. Wandering through my childhood home alone, still overflowing with furniture, rugs and so many memorable things, brought back many memories. I would hear voices, singing and music. Familiar scents came wafting to my nose. Floorboards creaked at the same spots, and they made me smile! The attic was still full of mystery. In the garden stood the old apple tree, still faithfully bearing fruit. Further back, hidden under heavy branches was the cubby house, now full of stuff. The swing was hanging by a thread, the chook house was still visible, and there were fragments of our vegie patch.

Then I set out catching up with the relatives, reconnecting ancestral grounds. Rekindling old friendships, where time had stopped, we filled the years with laughs and tears. Now my heart was overflowing with all these re-gathered memories, and they needed to be expressed. Thus the Vessel was created. And as each memory had its own character and texture, several techniques were used to express them - painting, pastel, collage, fusing them, overlapping them with free and creative hand and machine embroidery and all kinds of fabrics, feathers and threads.

Vessel of Dreams
Collaged textiles, machine embroidered and hand embellished
Faux-felt is a new process which I’ve recently developed and I’m still discovering endless possibilities for its application. It can be varied by changing the character/nature of the foundation, also by different forms of manipulating the surface whilst still using the basic formula of the technique. It is the current fruition of a long life of fabric and textile/fibre play and work. From beginnings in dressmaking and clothing construction, I included patchworking and then quilting to my repertoire.

Then came serious experimentation with fabric manipulation and surface embellishment. I currently design and sell contemporary wall pieces as well as wearable art clothing under my own label. I’m developing a Faux-felt Collection and loving it!

I was not always able to go with the Flow

Inflammatory Remarks
Silk, mohair, wool, unspun fibres and spun threads on cotton foundation
Wendy Holland ~ New South Wales

When we first moved to the mountains I had no workroom - just a table in the bedroom piled up on top and stuffed underneath, which accounts for the diminished scale and crowded nature of things begun at that time. Half-finished textile pieces are still surfacing several years later as reminders of the total chaos that playing with bits of fabric can create in a restricted space.

As well as memories of more recent times the kimono fragments in the two pieces in the exhibition hold particular memories of art school days in the 60’s - of going down to old Paddy’s Markets near Dixon Street (where you could buy a kimono or sawn-off granny dress for about $6), and when Japanese pattern and design, and textiles in general started taking over my life.

Years later, after much cutting stitching, painting, knitting, patching, etc, I seem to be coming back full circle - I have started painting again, using the subjects closest to hand, with patterned fabrics featuring prominently.

Intimate Proximity

Distant Intimity
Collaged fabrics, machine embroidered and hand stitched
Dianne Jones ~ New South Wales

Working with textiles is my favourite medium as an artist. I can translate my ideas into quilts, clothing, accessories - whatever will lend itself to a measure of textile fabrication via decoration and cutting.

My work is motivated by my vision of life at a given moment - usually, I hope, presented with a quirky twist that invites the viewer to smile in recognition of the visual joke I may be displaying. I see my approach to my work as the external manifestation of my view of Life, and that strange subset of human unfathomables which include: love, hate, revenge, friendship and the scary stuff lurking at the bottom of my children’s school bags.

**Corrugations I: the Spaces Between**

**Corrugations 2: Flow Through**

**The Lolly Quilt**

Free cut layering of fabrics, machine pieced and quilted
Deb Leake ~ New South Wales

I’ve used my old TAFE dressmaking samples, both from teaching and my initial training. All those 1970’s fabrics place this quilt in a specific time-frame of memories. There’s even hand stitched buttonholes and fives ways to put in a zipper! I often wonder what will happen to all those skills when my generation has passed.

‘Past Lives’ Wagga
Penny Seta ~ New South Wales

Off the coast of Darwin, on Bathurst Island, the Aboriginal Tiwi people work wonders. Incredible heads carved out of ironwood; bark baskets (tungas) painted in rich natural ochres. Unique hand-printed fabrics reflect life on the island. Timeless, abstract depictions of the stone axe, the blue-tongue lizard, the snake, the totem pole…

The kimono is a long, Japanese robe with sleeves (Oxford dictionary). Actually it’s much more. The kimono is a magnificent concept that has survived for thousands of years. It can be anything you want it to be. The more movement, contrast and interplay the better. I see and exciting contrast between the age-old simplicity of the kimono, and the Tiwi designs which have been handed down through generations. And then I like to break up the tradition. For me the kimono is a canvas.

In Day the vibrant snake design is set off by muted tones in the pandanus print. The lining is like a red sky. The cotton velvet on the shoulders is from a Tiwi butterfly print. Night uses the sophisticated blue-tongue lizard print in yellow and white ochre, which is earthed by the snake print of the sleeves and the panels. The lining brings it all to life.

Day and Night

Original Tiwi cotton prints, rayon linings, machine pieced
Cloud/sky watching is one of my favourite pass-times - although I rarely have the opportunity to lie on my back to do so. I love the sheer unpredictability and unrepeatability of cloud formations. Even though they are classified as cumulous, nimbus, etc, no two days of clouds are the same, reflecting the diversity beyond count of the many aspects of creation which is the life-force of the universe. Having been burdened with and possibly confused by many names on its completion, Flag of the Gaian Republic (feels good to be dreaming) evolved from a very simple design idea, and then presented a thousand more names and concepts in the process of its making. This is what I love about the creative process.

Flag of the Gaian Republic
Variety of commercial and home dyed fabrics, machine pieced and quilted
Annabelle Solomon ~ New South Wales

My work in textiles is always inspired by symbols and the symbolic in some way, influencing the final shape, colours and forms of the artquilts I create. For me, symbols are the (often unconscious) representation and manifestation of the (often considered disembodied/unreal) spiritual aspects of our lives, the divine self which infuses all aspects of how we experience life on planet Earth. Through the textile arts I am seeking to re-create meaning and a sense of the numinous, particularly as it relates to my life as member of the gendered species, woman.

*Ages of Woman: Maiden, Mother, Crone* pays homage to the awesome complexities of the lives of woman as traditionally distinguished by three transitional stage in the process of our experiencing the ‘whole’/holy. Each stage, or period, is contained within and by the others through the holistic integration of life’s creative processes, hence the three traditional colours symbolic in the Euro-western tradition of a woman’s life-cycle (white, red and black) are represented in each of the pubic triangles.

Veils have been traditionally worn by women, ostensibly as a means of protection, effectively forming a border to pass through, usually by conquest or by ownership. The veil can also be envisaged as a protection from the power behind the veil, as a cocoon or place of mysterious metamorphosis protecting the sacred autonomy which leads to creative emergence and transformation.

*Ages of Woman: Maiden, Mother, Crone*
Various fabric types, pieced, overlaid and machine quilted
Jo Steele ~ New South Wales

Having started out on my journey into the textile arts by making traditional and then a more contemporary style of quilt, my work began to diversify after the TAFE course in Commercial Needlecraft, and has continued to find still more points of creative divergence, resting now in the work I am doing with wire and thread.

Likewise, everyone’s spiritual journey takes them down different paths. In the past few years of my life, an acceptance of my spiritual self has given greater significance to my work in fibre and taken me on a phase of the journey which is renewing the inspiration and energy for my work in textiles. Odyssey in Transparency is about this process. We often think of the spirit as transparent, invisible - we don’t see it - but with insight it is tangible.

On this spiritual/textile journey, I have come to the realisation that working with wire is where I want to focus my future work. It has something to do with the invisible and tangible, seemingly contradictory, yet somehow harmonious. In using the medium of wire to re-fabricate my memories, I have looked to the influence of my mother and her dressmaking and millinery skills, as well as to the childhood trips to the hardware store with my father. Totems are symbolic, representative of a clan, tribe or family (at once visible and invisible). Going to buy the wire for my Totems brought back that feeling of joy and excitement when I went to the hardware store with my father.

Embroiderer’s Totem  I

Odyssey in Transparency
Machine and hand embroidery into wire mesh
On my cross-stitched raft I set out.
I remember so many cross-stitches on gingham.
The nuns taught me to cross-stitch so neatly.
I loved the dull monotony.
It kept me connected.
I stitch therefore I am.
I somehow feel enthusiastic about the continuous repetition of stitches, like a mantra.
Joining small pieces of cloth together - building texture, colours, to take me somewhere else -
with thread that breaks and snaps -
but I keep on stitching.
Only stitching matters.

Raft
Mixed media, appliqued and free machine stitched
Denise Trent ~ New South Wales

I have always had a need to express myself artistically - painting, sculpture, weaving, printing, photography. Although each was enjoyable, none have given me the joy and fulfilment that textiles have. The beautifully produced catalogue of the 1991 New Quilt Exhibition at the Manly gallery, given to me by a friend, astounded me. It opened a door to a place I didn’t know existed.

I had always loved exotic fabrics, but short of draping them over furniture and on the walls, I had never been aware of the possibilities that existed. The Manly women (and man) showed me that a quilt could be a work of art - that fabric and stitches could be used like paint and brushstrokes.

I then set out to learn ‘patchwork’ and the journey has been a wonderful experience. Sewing had never appealed to me, so I had to start with the basics. I knew nothing! Whilst still not technically proficient as I would like to be, I have reached a place where I can have an idea - whether a colour combination, a memory recollection, or a painting I like - and translate this into a textile work.

Colour is my greatest inspiration, and modern painting a major influence. My aim is to produce a work that I like to look at, I usually don’t verbalise my motivations or talk about deeper meanings in my work. I start with fabrics and colours that I LOVE and go from there. It all flows like a big smooth wave and I just let myself go along with it. I love to quilt the finished work using beads, cords, gold threads, tassels - anything that embellishes the surface.

Piecemeal
Layered fabrics – silks, satins, silks and velvets; machine pieced, hand quilted using gold threads and beads
It is the process by which this piece was created that gave it its name and its meaning. The ‘pole wrapping’ technique of Shibori dyeing was fascinating to learn, as it involved a ‘doing’ and an ‘undoing’. The white silk georgette was fastened around the plastic pipe tightly with a strong cord. The discipline it took to put up with the pain in the arms and back while winding the cord evenly around the pipe, painting the colour to the scrunched and gather silk, then unraveling the silk to discover the exciting beauty you had created seemed to parallel the way things work out in my life. An often Painful experience, or a disciplined learning experience gives way to something special, unexpected and beautiful.

*I was blind but now I see:* words have meaning beyond what I can express with colour. I believe that through the use of language we can reinterpret and art object. By giving this work its title (through a line taken from the Scriptures), I have given the object more memory and meaning, which work on different levels of understanding.

*Unravelled*

Shibori dyeing technique on silk georgette, presented as a fabric sculpture

*I was blind but now I see*

Air-brushed fabrics, piece, appliquéd and quilted
re-fabricating

the future

2 June - 25 June 2000
Braemar Gallery
Springwood NSW

An exhibition of Australian women’s contemporary textile art
curated by Annabelle Solomon
Curatorial Thesis

The way of the future reaches into the present and shapes our processes….that which grips our imagination will determine our futures....the future is in our hands!

What opportunities are hidden in the heart of this creative moment in time and history for a radical ‘re-storying’ - or re-fabricating - of the questions of life by our imaginative reflections, both personal and cultural?

What re-birth might our creative work seek to call forth? What values presented through the diversity of our art might become part of a larger patchwork of templates for future creations?

In a Universe being born from the beginning of time, what deep memories might provide the fabric for creating the future?

What is our own magical contribution as women to creating the future – magic being the elemental stuff of art, of weaving unseen forces into form.
#2: Directory of exhibiting artists

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</table>
NERIDA RICHMOND BENSON

Bushwalk Pocket Quilt

(122x95cms)
NERIDA RICHMOND BENSON
Zen Quilt
(107x107cms)
CREATION STORY
SANDRA BURCHILL
Communications
(110x84cms)
VICTORIA BONANNO
Saturday Night Fever
(60x35cms)
SUE DENNIS
Dom.estic.com – chained to the sink
(85x51cms)
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
LOUISE DUVERNET
No limits
(85x60cms)
CREATION STORY
Dianne Firth
Continuum
(70x50cms)
CREATION STORY
DIANNE JONES

Yesterday’s Promise of Tomorrow
150x150cms

CREATION STORY
DIANNE JONES
Caroline keeps her eye on the future
(36x50cms)
CREATION STORY
DEB LEAKE

5/9 the future will fill the gaps
(20X20CMS)

CREATION STORY
GLENYS MANN
Driftnet
(85x65cms)
CREATION STORY
GLENYS MANN
Odyssey Fragments
(65x37cms)
CREATION STORY
DEBORAH McARDLE
Concoction
(94x68cms)
ALISON MUIR

Short Poppies are Valuable Too
(137x99cms)

CREATION STORY
RHONDA RETTKE
Licorice Allsorts
(130x80cms)
CREATION STORY
CHRISTA SANDERS
The Key is Love
(180x148cms)
LARRAINE SCOULER
Don’t fence me in
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
PENNY SETA
Smoke Signal
CREATION STORY
ANNABELLE SOLOMON
Womanlines
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
JOANNE STEELE
Straight and Narrow
& Empty Vessel
CREATION STORY
SUE WADEMAN
Water-fall
LYN WARD

She who shines in the dark
(200x150cms)

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
END

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Directory of Exhibiting Artists
SANDRA BURCHILL
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VICTORIA BONANNO
CREATION STORY
DEBORAH McARDLE
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
SUE WADEMAN
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
Nerida Richmond Benson ~ New South Wales

Free-form log cabin blocks contain see-through pockets revealing found objects collected during Tuesday bushwalks with friends. This is a new kind of quilt which can be re-fabricated as new, imaginative and changing ideas fill and re-fill its pockets over time. The quilt can change as the artist changes.

Log cabin blocks are built around a central found object on which to centre during meditation. One’s focus is ultimately pulled to the central block of the quilt.

**Bushwalk Pocket Quilt (122x95cms)**
Cotton fabrics, tulle, found objects, photographs; machine pieced, hand and machine quilting

**Zen Quilt (107x107cms)**
cotton fabrics, collected objects, machine pieced, machine and hand quilting
Sandra Burchill ~ Queensland

From pictograms in ancient Egypt to pictograms on space ships going into the unknown. From boys on bikes delivering telegrams to email mysteriously coming along fibre optics - communication has changed so much in my lifetime.

Communications (110x 84cms)
strip piecing and couching
By doing all those thousand stitches, like thoughtful footsteps, I reach deep down into the creative soul and reconnect with ancient timeless imagination, returning my offerings. There I feel a great joy, fulfillment and togetherness with old and emerging cultures and especially with all my sisters of the cloth, weaving wisely our sacred stories into the fabric of our daily lives.

Between Heaven and Earth (153 x 88cms)
Hand felted, cotton, silk woolen and metallic threads; beads, feathers, copperwire; collaged and hand embroidered
Sue Dennis ~ Queensland

Have women progressed any further in 2000 than in 1950? Are we re-fabricating our future on a foundation of old-fashioned values but with the super high gloss of ‘modern’ society? Women create the future generations. Women are the primary nurturers and carers, cooks and cleaners. Women cannot fully escape these roles. The traditional quilt pattern, Irish Chain, is interpreted in modern cleaning cloths with a painted wadding background. This is the first quilt in the dom.estic.com series relating to the role of women in the home.

dom.estic.com-chained to the sink (85 X 51cms)
cleaning cloths, painted wadding, machine quilted, cotton backing
Louise DuVernet ~ New South Wales

The Celtic knot patchwork which forms the centre of the quilt was the result of the Lammas 2000 workshop with Annabelle Solomon. The sashiko stitching was inspired by an exhibition called ‘Common Threads’. The Japanese stitched textiles in the exhibition were of the common people in 17th century Japan.

The fabrics chosen for my project were remnants of past projects. The use of sashiko stitching is representative of the seeds of Lammas that support the chains of friendship which grow out of creative endeavour. These chains provide a matrix in which we thrive. They pose no limits, just offer support as we each strive for our true fulfilment.

No Limits (85 x 60cms )
furnishing fabrics, sashiko stitching and quilting
The future, as is the present, is a continuation of the past. This concept is visualised as a tunnel with a light in the distance drawing us forward. It is the proverbial ‘light at the end of the tunnel’.

**Continuum (70 x 50cms)**

Collage of torn strips closely quilted; cotton fabric polyester batting
Dianne Jones ~ New South Wales

Most of these fabrics were out and about, in frocks and curtains, when I was a child. They are 1950’s era, like me. They represent my past, but give no indication whatsoever of my future, except maybe to warm the aging bones. Just keep dancing, I say!

My friend, Carolyn, who is having her third round of chemotherapy, really liked this quilt - so now it belongs to her. I’ve made her a quilt and a hat for the past two chemo rounds and this is the one to take her into the future.

Yesterday’s Promise of Tomorrow (…)

Carolyn keeps her eye on the future (36 X 50cms)
machine pieced and quilted; made with cotton, silk, poly-satins, metallic thread.
machine pieced and commercially quilted
Deb Leake ~ New South Wales

Quilts are no longer desperately needed to keep us warm - so why our continuing fascination? The elements that have meaning for me are recycling (- what other way for the future?), and old skills given new relevance. Like life, we make it up as we go along, adding bits when we run out, patching up the mistakes and getting on with it. It makes a connection to the past - will it connect to the future?

5/9 - the future will fill the gaps (20 x 20cms)
natural and indigo dyed fabrics, hand pieced
This piece is an environmental statement about the drift netting that devours innocent marine life.

This is a collection of the fragments of life’s journey, made from pieces collected, discarded, or ignored during the long odyssey.

**Driftnet (85 x 65cms)**

**Odyssey Fragments V (65 x 37cms)**

hand dyed cotton and silk, beaded, machine embellished, twisted fabric knotted
These op-shop wool blankets have been reborn - they live again, have another future. They bring with them their past life of comfort and warmth, and have been re-coloured and re-invented for a future life - to give someone else comfort - perhaps an inner sense of well being. The magical transformation from cream, pale blue, pink and green, to strong vibrant colours is evidence of an attempt to re-create the way I usually work - by introducing less planning and more freedom in the future!

Concoction (94 x 68cms)
old wool blankets painted with wool dyes; machine pieced, hand quilted and stitched
The Australian culture in the twentieth century was one of cutting down tall poppies, those who had achieved, and those whose heads were above the rest. I think we need tall and short poppies. A culture which has a place for every person shows a nurturing, caring, valued community, and one that will survive into the future. This quilt is my statement for the twenty-first century, and the attitude I wish to see people live by.

The technique I usually use, of placing strips of silk onto a backing layer and stitching through them, has been developed further with this quilt by following different directions and interweaving the strips.

Short Poppies are Valuable Too (137 x 99cms)
machine applique and quilting; mostly silk, felt wadding, cotton backing.
Rhonda Rettke ~ Queensland

Australia is like a licorice allsort, each layer representing the different nationalities of the country. We have a wide range of cultures living and working together to make one country that we are all proud of - blending together to make one nationality, ‘Australian’. In continuing this process, the future looks bright!

Licorice Allsorts (130 x 80cms)
patchwork using mixture of hand dyed and commercial fabrics
Christa Sanders ~ ACT

Quilts I have made contain both memories and dreams for the future. Sometimes I ask myself why it is, that if I come to an understanding through my work, I feel that it was something that I already knew. Are these interpretations on subjects constantly invented anew, created through forgetting where we are placed and where we are heading? Imagination is the most precious part of this process. But there are boundaries, some of them taken through choice - a displaced creativity seems to rule our lives sometimes. The level of difficulty in how to nurture imagination varies greatly- and the key to creating a better future is to nurture imagination simply for the love of it.

The Key is Love (180 x 148cms)

Soft furnishing fabrics, blends.; machine pieced, appliqued, hand quilted
Larraine Scouler ~ New South Wales

For me this is a quite tiny quilt - as I love to think big. Name came from a throwaway comment from a friend about the sad state of affairs of the world in general but more particularly her own immediate plight ... little wonder we bother in the face of such destruction ... so little wonder this is as it's my 'little wonder' to brighten the way ahead.

All too often these days we’re met with barriers and frontiers that keep moving and changing form. Being intelligent and capable (although female) matters little when you are chronologically endowed or less than physically perfect. One's worth is judged on appearances, pity as that is only skin-deep.

Little Wonder
cottons, hand dyed and commercial; machine pieced and quilted

Don’t Fence Me In
cottons, hand dyed and commercial fabrics; machine pieced and ‘back to front’ quilted
Penny Seta ~ New South Wales

Instinctively I have used natural fibres to form a simple, timeless shape, and colours that represent air and water with a hint of fire. It was part of my project to use only materials that I already had, and to change them without a plan - to let the garment evolve like a piece of sculpture. As it happened, the wool used was originally the same pale pink-beige, even the shibori wool used for the collar. For a long time I have felt an affinity with the American Indian. When I’d finished this piece, my first thought was that it reminded me of a smoke signal. Something that’s been smouldering for ages. Hopefully, in the future, the message these people have been giving out for so long will finally hit home.

Smoke Signal
hand-dyed and constructed pure wool double poncho, with shibori collar, silk inserts and cotton saddle stitching.
Unlike the usual historical time lines, woman lines stretch into a distant unwritten past, blending into the present, with a constant eye towards the future. From earliest times, women have collected the universal life force in vessels and containers - be they collecting food for children and family, or the vessels used in ritual ceremony for honouring the past and seeing into the future. From earliest times the body of woman has been understood as the primary sacred vessel, mysteriously bringing forth and nurturing new life into a new cycle of creation - a unique way of both looking to the future and bringing it into existence. This understanding is being renewed in the present for the future by recognising the body of Earth as Mother, a realisation very familiar to our ancestors. Working with fabric gives me a sense of connection with other women, both contemporary, past and future, and a encourages a deep sense of myself as participator and author in the creation through destruction process of the universe - remembered in the maiden, mother and crone aspects of women’s lives and bodies.

**Womanlines**

machine piecing, using mixed fabric types and threads;

screen print designs by Sue Swanson
This time last year I had gotten over my disbelief in a god and had taken a turn down a path towards a god I knew little about, and what I did know was largely false. The path was Christianity - a path I was trying to resist and reject. A year later I am embracing it. My life is now guided by my spiritual beliefs. My work has also taken a turn this past year. I have moved away from quilt making quilts towards embroideries, which sometimes still take the basic form of a quilt, with its three layers. I continue to work with aluminium wire mesh and dare to call myself a ‘fly wire artist’, a process which satisfies my love of metal and allows me to create 3D objects using forms I have long been interested in.

The embroidery, *Straight and Narrow* describes my future: I will walk the straight and narrow path according to my Christian beliefs. But don’t think it allows me no freedom. *Empty Vessel* describes the feeling of letting go and being free of the past, ready to be filled with the future.
Denise Trent ~ New South Wales

I am greatly influenced by things past - inspiration from ethnic textiles, embroideries and felts, particularly central Asian and Indian. For me the way to the future is through the past.

Looking Back to the Future
furnishing fabrics, hand made felt, beads, tassels and gold thread; machine pieced, hand and free machine quilting
‘The greatest stone sculptors of the past cannot rival that of water and time’… an apt inscription at the foot of a waterfall near Milford Sound in the Fiordland National Park area of New Zealand. But long before I read this, the understanding of water as both powerful and beautiful was the concept behind this expression of my work. If we were to become as water we would flow and fall, not hesitating at the edge of life’s crevices and cliffs - but race forward with not a thought for the ‘danger’ below. Like water on its journey, we would fly off the edge to be in all our glory, as the cascading beauty of a waterfall, trusting that if we didn’t ‘jump’, we would miss an opportunity to experience the journey of our lifetime!

Water-fall
Silk organza hand dyed by the artist using shibori techniques with indigo dye; layer stitched randomly using free machine embroidery with rayon threads
Influences for my current art practice have been woven together from different experiences in the visual arts/crafts and other areas of creative participation. My mother taught me to use the sewing machine for making clothes for my dolls. Later I learnt painting, screen printing and print making.

This work was influenced by the Clarissa Pinkola Estees rendition of the traditional story of ‘Skeleton Woman’. The piece became a costume for a figure, and the headpiece was added as she appeared. It came from a desire to honour and celebrate the cycles of never-ending renewal, which come out of the dark, the sunless sea, the depths of wisdom, and the light which shines from a woman’s experience and comes from trusting an inner intuitive wisdom.

‘She’ represents a movement out of the restrictions I hold over myself - gradually meeting them, disentangling, untying all the knots threaded throughout my body and being - a weaving into my life of balance, courage and bravery to face obstacles in order to meet my true intuitive soul. And, out of the depths - from the tearing and tying, pinning and sewing, arranging and placing together of all the component parts - she appears, ragged, rough and shimmering!

*She who shines in the dark (200 x 150cms)*

dress and costume fabric, torn, tied, sewn, woven; found objects, beads
re-fabricating our lives

18 May - 10 June 2001
Braemar Gallery
Springwood NSW

An exhibition of Australian women’s contemporary textile art
curated by Annabelle Solomon
#3: Directory of exhibiting artists

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<td>Margery Goodall</td>
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<td>Lyn Ward &amp; group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alvena Hall</td>
<td>Jennifer Rolfe</td>
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DEBORAH BREARLEY
Holding on to
105x98cms
SANDRA BURCHILL

We never see all the pattern
114 x 84cms
DIJANNE CÉVAAL
Hellfire X1: Prometheus Bound
120 x 103 cms

CREATION STORY
DIJANNE CEVAAL
Why Resist #3
110x102cms
CREATION STORY
JAN CLARK
Gondwana II: Kauri Pine
65x145cms
CREATION STORY
JAN CLARK
Landscape IV: Forest Floor
132x61cms
MARION CURRY
Revelation, Reconciliation, Rebirth
105x65cms
SUE DENNIS
Dom.estic.com – home sweet home
37x88cms
DIANNE FIRTH
Black Hole
51x52cms
DENI GLIDDON
Windows on Nature – Nature’s Survival
110x160cms
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
MARGERY GOODALL
Chaos/Order/Chaos
50x94cms
ALVENA HALL
Pool – Mallee Series
58x90cms
DIANNE JONES
Gardens of Maturity
114x99cms
CREATION STORY
DEB LEAKE
A work in progress
120x35cms
GLENYS MANN
‘would be different if you were obliged to work for a living’
25x42cms
DEBORAH McArdle

Untied – Retied

145x93cms
ALISON MUIR
Huck’s Farm
80x120cms
ENID PADDON-ROWE
An International Affair
90x120cms
ELIZABETH OATES
Lilly’s Resolve
69x50cms
RHONDA RETTKE
Land forms – the Foundation of our Lives
61x71cms
JENNIFER ROLFE
Elemental Beings
150x105cms
CHRISTA SANDERS

We have an ocean of difference in common; the balance lies in the third, our spirit

108x195cms
LARRAINE SCOULER
Crazy for Orange
145x120cms
LARRAINE SCOULER
Happiness & Sorrow – a life in progress
158x158cms
CREATION STORY
ANNABELLE SOLOMON
Horizons in Time: Past, Present & Future
51x37cms
JO STEELE
Anenomes Series I
99 x 92cms
CREATION STORY
JO STEELE
Anenome Series IV
96x32xms
CREATION STORY
DENISE TRENT
Toran
134x127cms
THE EXHIBITIONS

YVONNE VOSS
Sky Glow
120x68cms
SUE WADEMAN
Sacred
57x119cms
CREATION STORY
LISA WALTON
Bushfire
104x90cms
CREATION STORY
LISA WALTON
Opalescence
90x70cms
CREATION STORY
LYN WARD, SALLY BLEFARI, DEB DUNN, LORET RUNAGALL

It’s just what we do

200x200cms
END

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the Directory of Exhibiting Artists
DEBORAH BREARLEY
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
SANDRA BURCHILL
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
JAN CLARK
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
MARION CURRY

CREATION STORY

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THE EXHIBITIONS
ALVENA HALL
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
DEB LEAKE
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
GLENYS MANN
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
DEBORAH McArdle
CREATION STORY
THE EXHIBITIONS
PADDON ROWE & MUIR (back of quilt)

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
LARRAINE SCOULER
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
The Exhibitions

Denise Trent Image 1 Detail

Denise Trent
Creation Story

The Exhibitions
LYN WARD and group

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
Deborah Brearley ~ ACT

The quilt was started at a time of great change in my life. Nothing was sure any more. Everything seemed to be at a crossroads, there was no clear pathway. One way to keep going was to hold on to a belief that to ‘let go’ would ultimately mean that a way would come clearer. Rather than thrashing about trying to find a way, let the mud settle and let the water become clear. Simply have faith.

The cyanotype central panel has my hands and forearms juxtaposed with a dragonfly and heart symbol. The insect has existed in much the same form since prehistoric times and, for me, is a symbol of resilience. Dissecting stitched lines run through the heart and hands.

The stark blue and white cyanotype image itself is a symbol of clarity and transformation. Clear skies, clear water are part of the process of its making. As well, the surface of the cloth is marked by the former presence of leaves, twigs and the outstretched hands and arms.

Finishing the quilt recently, after a long sojourn, meant a time of reflection and a realisation that the only thing that one can be sure of is change. To be able to adapt and be receptive to change is to be like a dragonfly! They fly high and travel far!

Cyanotype, screen printing, fabric painting; machine piecing and quilting, machine stitchery, hand binding
Sandra Burchill ~ Queensland

Our lives are made up of duties and pleasures, sorrow and joy, hopes and dreams - a lot of contrasts that I wanted to introduce in the fabric - even confusion. The irregular shapes because we never get the “big picture”. Some joy bubbling to the surface.

Machine pieced and quilted; beading and couching
I love the old Greek creation tales, which have the Gods and Mortals behave in extra-ordinary ways. This is my interpretation of the tale of Prometheus who stole fire from Zeus and carried it back to human kind in the pith of a fennel bulb. Of course the God was unhappy and unleashed Pandora on Prometheus’ unsuspecting brother…the rest is history! Fire for me is synonymous for both creation and the creative spirit.

I love simple resist techniques: they have been used for decoration since time immemorial and still add to the fabric of our lives in the 21st Century.

Hand dyed fabric by the artist, burning; heavily machine quilted
Jan Clark ~ New South Wales

During the Jurassic Period (208 to 144 million years ago) the world climate was uniformly warm and wet. Vegetation consisting of Conifers, Cycads, Ferns and Ginkgos, was lush and dense. The thread drawing is of a 175 million year old fossil of a Kauri Pine twig. Kauris today are confined to rare and protected rainforests but were widespread in Jurassic Times.

This quilt is one of a series that is a response to my environment when I returned from two years overseas in Northwest America. Australia, past and present, dominated my thoughts. The uniqueness of our landscape had become even more significant to me and I worked with the colours of the land, and plant imagery, to express my love of this country. By working through the series I really felt that I had come home. I consider myself a landscape artist but my landscapes are not the views that fade to the horizon, but the intricate detail of the very small within the landscape.

Fabric collage, machine lace, machine quilting, thread drawing; hand dyed cottons, glitz, mixed yarns

Fabric collage, reverse applique; hand dyed cottons, silks, glitz, beading and embroidery
Marion Curry ~ Queensland

This fabric was dyed and overdyed with natural bush materials. When it was dry, shadowy faces and bones were revealed. To some viewers they represent Aboriginal, European or Asian faces. To others, men and women. There are barriers and bars in the way of most reconciliation attempts at the moment, but the bars are not as strong as people think and they will eventually disintegrate, leading to the birth of a new Australia.

Revelation, Reconciliation, Rebirth (105 x 64 cms)
Natural dyes, recycled wool, rep curtains, threads, torn silk, various stitching
Sue Dennis ~ Queensland

Is it “home sweet home” when we have a domestic violence awareness week? The traditional log cabin block is given a new lease of life with the use of modern cleaning cloths on a painted wadding background.

I’m trying to engage the viewer in a deeper exploration of the quilt layers and surface by exposing the wadding and using domestic cleaning cloths familiar to most. This is the second quilt in the dom.estic.com series exploring the role of women in the home.

Machine free motion writing, machine applique, painted wadding, cotton fabric, cleaning cloths
In December 2000, after seven years of part-time study teamed up with full-time work, family and quilting, I submitted my doctoral dissertation for examination. Now, four months later, I still have not heard from the examiners.

My self confidence is strained and an anxiety, bordering on a sense of despair, haunts me. I feel like I am falling into a “black hole”. My hope is that I will emerge from this situation unscathed and be able to get on with my life. In making this quilt, I have tried to convey a sense of direction, focus and intensity of effort that suddenly disappears into blackness only to re-emerge after a minor setback.

Torn-strip collage, machine appliqué, machine quilting
I use fabric to paint pictures - pictures which tell a story. This time it is about viewing our world through windows. While designing this quilt, I came to realise that we so often view our world through the windows of buildings of vehicles, rather than directly experiencing it…we ‘fabricate’ our experiences.

Hand-dyed and commercial fabrics
This quilt is made from the scraps of old works, and the offcuts from new ideas, which to me equates with life itself. It utilizes the formal qualities of line, colour and shape to celebrate the real big picture – the one we can create from the layers of our lives.

As a woman and a human being, and a part of this world, my life is not made up of epic adventures and grand plans. Rather it consists of a multiplicity of fragments and layers, which together create the real big picture – a picture that I recognise is always changing. Layers move, change and fragment, then reform to create new realities and new meanings. As an individual, I make sense of the world through attention to the minutiae of my life.

I believe that as human beings, we have lost our way; we look too long at the horizon, spend too much time trying to make sense of our world. Although nothing is ever what it seems, everything is connected to everything else. That sense of connection is what I want to take into this new century – without an awareness of the connections we all have with each other and with all on this planet, we cannot even begin to have an overall view of the world we live in, or to solve its problems.

Chaos/Order/Chaos (Fragments & Layers #3) (50 x 94 cms)
Hand pieced and machine quilted from cotton scraps, cotton poplin and ramie fabrics
This work came out of a TAFTA workshop with Sandy Webster (USA). It’s main themes are loss, a childhood spent in the Mallee, and the poems of John Shaw Neilson. The ‘pool’ with swimmers is reflected on the back of the quilt - the black-water pool. The image is seen through a barrier of fire-scorched mallee.

Hand dyed cottons, kozo, nylon organza, dyed tyvek; machine embroidery; quilted text: poem ‘Loves Coming’ by John Shaw Neilson 1872-1942
Brian Swimme (a leading cosmologist) says that it is necessary for a balance of Subjectivity, Communion & Differentiation to be present in order for the Universe to survive and to continue to keep unfolding its’ magnificence. I’ve been thinking about this idea in relation to the survival and unfolding of the individual human being—most especially, an immigrant.

My quilt, Interiors, is a response to these thoughts. The raw edged, strip-pieced blocks contain important symbols and images/photographs pertaining to countries I have called home. The surrounding areas contain ‘foggier’ images, atmospheric influences and defined pathways connecting these countries/rooms/interiors of my ‘self’ and my life. There is evidence of Subjectivity, Communion and Differentiation— but I’m not sure that a balance of these is possible when a person does not live in their original ‘biom’. I’m still exploring this.

Faux-felt (reg): silk, mohair, wool, yarns; cottons- pieced and appliquéd photo transfers; beading, hand & machine embroidery
Dianne Jones ~ New South Wales

After seeing some of my other work, an older neighbour gave me a bag of fabric and beads that she was throwing away (I just love using ‘leftovers’ in my work). With fabric leftovers also given to me by another older friend, I’ve made this quilt. The fabric is from making clothes. The embroidery is from old patched clothing. This quilt is to celebrate the life gardens nurtured by these two older women friends.

Machine pieced & quilted, hand beaded, cotton & synthetics
Deb Leake ~ New South Wales

Life is a work in progress, taking what we know and have learnt in the past, trying to make it fit into the present and maybe the future. We forget, or loose, some bits, have to reshape others, consciously discard some and take on totally new ideas or ways of being. This work seeks to symbolise this concept- recreating a traditional medium so that some of the past always informs the present and future.

Silk, wool, cotton fabric and threads; indigo, natural & eco dyed; patchwork/applique, stitching
Glenys Mann ~ New South Wales

From my emotions series on documents. This being a page from a woman’s diary with words and memorabilia from a postcard dated 29.10.1905.

Linen, photocopied image on organza, old lace, old buttons; hand stitched words, silk thread, old post card, staples, blue printing
Deborah McArdle ~ Victoria

We continually ‘refabricate’ our lives by all we do. My work uses the rich and intricate patterns of the everyday tie, each with their own past history-rescued from oblivion in op-shops; and gives them a ‘new life!’ a new form to adorn our world, and enrich our lives.

Machine pieced, hand quilted; quilt top pieced entirely from old ties
Huck is my father and he has always wanted to have a farm. At 78 he has the money and the time for a farm, but his family do not want him isolated on a farm. So we got together and made him a quilt for his wall that is Huck’s Farm and he can go there from his living room in Manly by the sea.

Fusing, machine quilting, appliqué, silk, cotton, polyester, viscose, lame, lace on wool felt, cotton back
Alison Muir & Enid Paddon-Rowe ~ NSW

Alison Muir was commissioned by Steve Parker to make a wall hanging using his tie collection from when he worked for the United Nations for Australia. Steve liked the idea of small 3-D boxes using the ties as it implied parts of the whole in boxes. The quilt is double sided, the back is called Tie Back and is put together by Enid Paddon-Rowe. We collaborated on the quilt for Steve Parker as he said we could keep whatever was left over after the wall hanging was made. We both make and collect ties for quilts.

Fusing, machine quilting, appliqué, silk, cotton, polyester, viscose, lame, lace on wool felt, cotton back
I made this quilt in honour of my little dog Lilly, two days after her untimely death. Lilly was a delight and I enjoyed knowing and loving her for over ten years. It has also been even more tragic and sad as it followed the death of my mother whom I loved dearly and who passed away late last year. Their passing from my life has been a huge loss.

This quilt has enabled me to resolve some of this pain. It is representative of the ancient stone circles and symbolic to me of the universal spiral and the all encompassing circle of life and death. The process of expressing and focusing my creative energy through the medium of fabric, with the incorporation of colours and symbols, has led me a step closer to healing these losses and to help me move on in my life.

Cotton and silk; curved piecing with bonded appliqué; free machine quilting & embroidery
Rhonda Rettke ~ Queensland

I have been exploring the idea of the patterned landscape being the solid foundation on which we build our lives. To hold these foundations together we need an added strength to bind us as one.

Silk painting, free machine embroidery, wire mesh
Jennifer Rolfe ~ New South Wales

Fire from the north blesses my spirit.

Living water from the east purifies my being.

Breath of air from the south fills me with inspiration.

Earth energy from the west gives birth to my creativity.

My life as a mother involves structures, routines and timetables. These however are often thrown into disarray (often to the point of chaos) with the ebb and flow of living within the many roles I fulfil as a woman. This quilt represents the dichotomy between the structured and unstructured facets of my life. The process of creating the quilt highlighted the psycho/spiritual importance of textiles in my life. The creative process is vital for integrating and facilitating connection with myself and the universal divine feminine. My life can thus be seen as part of a cycle within cycles, chaos within structure but always filled with mysticism.

Commercial and hand dyed fabrics; hand and machine pieced & quilted
Christa Sanders ~ ACT

Creating images of our very different experiences in textile art places us in a fortunate position. Diversity everywhere, not just in the materials and techniques, but in the context of the works. Our storytelling of today is interwoven with matters of the world.

I see my work as a reflection of experiences. Mostly living at a self imposed hectic pace, every single day absorbing more and more information, I find myself craving for balance and harmony. Not just for myself, but for the world. My experience has been that there is usually conflict within opposites. We have not been able to find the energies to resolve these differences.

This quilt explores the notion that we have differences in common. It would make sense to respect them, since our common humanity lies within these differences. The balance it seems to me provided by the ‘third’- the heart, the soul, the spirit.

Commercial and hand dyed fabrics; hand and machine pieced & quilted
Larraine Scouler ~ New South Wales

Colour is a powerful force, exerting a strong influence on individuality. I am one with myself when using colours like these – strong, abrasive, vibrantly hypnotic. The quilt developed from a coincidence of time and place; with the purchase of a classic but zany 70’s dress in a local thrift shop. Although totally unsuitable as a patchwork fabric (excessively open weave), I could not ignore it as I already had it partnered in my mind with the exciting psychedelic print.

I don’t think I will ever be able to eliminate orange from my personal colour card as it continually compels and excites me – I’ve been through other colour phases but never like this – it’s a comfort zone. I now realise I am an orange person. I wish I had known this much earlier as I’d then possibly have had more of an understanding of my need to be different.

Machine pieced and ‘Back to Front’ quilted
In ‘fabricating’ momentous events in my daughter’s life I only noticed in hindsight that only happiness is portrayed. In discussion, we (the family) remembered the sad times, the ordinary and the mundane; occasions not suitably documented but equally important in the telling of a life. This set me thinking about the difference between memory and what’s on the public record; about how and what we, as a society, document and record as history and the particular view this will provide future generations. Personal memory is not always truthful but then neither is the biased public representation in our daily newspapers or electronic media that is perversely the opposite to the private; namely, it’s bad news that grabs the headlines – good news is no news!

I think of the treasured but faded photos of my ancestors and now realise they hide more secrets than they reveal. What you see is not always what you get. They show the faces but not the person. They record the event without revealing the memories – I am left to make of them what I can!

Machine pieced, appliquéd and quilted
The horizon is the meeting place of two realms: the solid and tangible presence of earth, and the seeming empty and unknown nothingness of sky - a place which may be conceptualised as that point where two lips meet in reciprocity to engage in creative exchange. It is a shifting place of mystery where the past and future meet in the present to continually form and re-form our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. As inspiration for quilt making, the ancient escarpments of the Blue Mountains elicits in me the awe and beauty of the mystery of all creation.

This is a ‘new generation’ quilt for the fullness of summer and forms part of the ever-changing series for *The Wheel of the Year*. Together with the other seven in the series, it dreams and envisions possibilities for new relationships and synchronicities between peoples and land, especially for those of us ‘transported’ from the northern hemisphere carrying (- sometimes dormant, nevertheless potent) memories of ancient stories and celebrations born of this relationship.

Hand dyed cottons, machine pieced & quilted; silk backing
Hand dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted
My life is being refabricated by freedom. Freedom, in and through my faith in God, is both immediate and a continuing process. So just as I create my textile art with a newfound freedom, I am being created anew by freedom. It was with freedom that I experimented with wool to see how I could manipulate it with stitchery.

The shapes in Anemone Series I, in an abstract way, reminded me of sea anemones. Anemone Series IV employs the same technique but I was reminded more of flowers. I was then pleased to learn there is a plant variety of Anemone. It is a plant from the buttercup family with a large showy flower.

Wool blends in padded relief appliqué; machine quilting, hand & machine stitchery
Padded wool relief appliqué; machine stitchery, machine quilting, beading
Denise Trent ~ New South Wales

My inspiration comes from traditional textiles of the world. Every culture has a unique way of expressing themselves through their textile work. Motivations and the availability of resources vary. Whether practical and functional with a specific use such as clothing, shelter, warmth….a religious or magical purpose which may ensure good fortune or protection, or simply to praise a deity or belief….a display of wealth, position or class….or a work made purely for visual pleasure, to showcase the makers’ skills, to produce a thing of beauty for its own sake.
Whatever the purpose, ethnic textiles will continue to influence me. It is exciting to be a part of the textile tradition and to gain endless inspiration from the work of other cultures.

Crazy pieced by machine using satins, silks, velvet, cotton & polyester fabrics; hand embellished and quilted, using beads with cotton & metallic threads.
Yvonne Voss ~ Victoria

Sky Glow was made as I wait to lose a beautiful daughter-in-law to a serious illness. The red shades show how angry and aggressive I feel at the futility and injustice at the loss of a vibrant, loving wife and mother. The torn edges are for the rough passages we all encounter throughout our lives. The piecing together of these irregular shapes into one whole is like the life experiences we as family all being together as we strive in our differing ways to deal with this crisis. Sky Glow has helped me cope.

Raw edge piecing using hand dyed & commercial fabrics; hand & machine quilted and couched
Sue Wademan ~ New Zealand

Last year I visited the UK, Scotland and Scandinavia where I visited Stonehenge, Glastonbury and the Viking sites and museums of Northern Europe. For some time now I have been drawn to religious & ritualistic symbolism, and this was my chance to see and understand better its meaning. 'Sacred' was inspired by the symbols I saw on some early Christian gravestones in Denmark. This triptych is the first in a series to explore that brief epiphany I had as I stood in front of these stones which pre date the Viking Age. I am fascinated by the crossover of Pagan symbolism into Christianity.

Machine applique & quilting; burnt edges and fused cotton fabrics from ‘Material Arts’, Christchurch, NZ
Lisa Walton ~ New South Wales

This piece of fabric while drying in the sun, jumped out and called desperately to be made into a quilt. The shibori technique created the most wonderful lines and textures and colours which inspired this simple yet intricate design. Hand quilting using aboriginal influence accentuates the feeling of fire with a hint of regrowth coming through.

The beautiful colours and textures of these hand-dyed fabrics are reminiscent of the wonderful colours of opals. A simple yet complex design, creating movement and texture throughout the piece.

Hand dyed shibori technique with hand quilted motifs
Hand dyed fabrics, machine pieced & hand quilted
Lyn Ward, Sally Blefari, Debbie Dunn, Loret Runagall
~ New South Wales

We are four women from varied backgrounds, drawn together initially by our children, then further through our journeying as women. Exploring women’s spirituality and celebrating the forces of the seasons. Weaving this connection into everyday life.

To honour this collaboration, we wove, placed, collected and experienced moments of vulnerability, awkwardness and fear. This was balanced by times of anticipation and the experience of sheer delight and wonder through play. By pouring water, symbolic of the emotional substance of our lives, onto wool lovingly placed, the liquid, chaotic meshing, slowly came to life, as a solid form of strength and beauty.

Felted merino tops with angora & mohair fleece; handspun naturally dyed wool; collected objects stitched on; handcrafted paper; pegs used in indigo dyeing; also objects which are personally significant have been included to honour and recognise those who have gone before us and after us.
re-fabricating

our indigenous spirit

21 June - 11 August 2002
Braemar Gallery
Springwood NSW

An exhibition of Australian women’s contemporary textile art
curated by Annabelle Solomon
Curatorial Thesis

Although the term ‘indigenous’ is most commonly associated with the original peoples of a given area of land, it can be argued that we are all custodians of traditions associated with a sense of place, giving rise to culturally treasured stories and symbols.

Nevertheless, cultural traditions do not remain static, and as creators of the story we are becoming more aware that we hold a common ancestry. This fact presents an opportunity: to recover qualities and attributes, stories and symbols inherent to our own indigenous spirit as women re-forming cultural myths and signs for a 21st century Australian story.

How are you re-fabricating a sense of your indigenous spirit? What are the signifiers of this process? By becoming in tune with the land/nature? Finding commonality in difference? The significance of the feminine principle in your cultural heritage? Respecting the way of mutual reciprocity?
#4: Directory of exhibiting artists

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JUNE BROWN

A Hole! Darn it! I'll Mend it!
(111 x 74cms)
SANDRA BURCHILL

Waiting for Oneself
(110 x 80cms)
YVONNE CHAPMAN

Between Heaven and Earth
(153 x 88cms)
JAN CLARK

Hillside (orange)
(106 x 152 cms)
MARION CURRY

The Barrier
(108 x 80cms)
MARION CURRY

Before We Came
(75 x 54cms)

CREATION STORY
SUE DENNIS

Thanks Babicka
(121 x 68cms)
LOUSIE DUVERNET

Making the pieces fit
(150 x 50cms)

CREATION STORY
DIANNE FIRTH

Blue Waves
(50 x 70cms)

CREATION STORY
MERRILYN GEORGE

Kororia ki te Atua
(Glory to God)
(86 X 107cms)
DENI GLIDDON

Cornucopia
-Horn of Plenty
(80 x 95cms)

CREATION STORY
ALVINA HALL

The Farina Series
(124 x 100cms)
DIANNE JONES

Time on my hands
(67 x 103cms)
DIANNE JONES
Transformation Garment

CREATION STORY
JENNIFER HOLLIS

Wave Length
(192 x 204cms)

CREATION STORY
LYN KABANOFF

Trocadero
(52 x 70cms)
LOANI LEE

Desire and Resistance
(103 x 129cms)
Karen Macpherson Image 1

Clonella –
Altered States
DEBORAH MCARDLE

Threads of Life
(146 x 50cms)

CREATION STORY
CYNTHIA MORGAN

Outback Images III Revisted
(125 x 90cms)
ALISON MUIR

Ascending Purple
(102 x 72cms)
ALISON MUIR

Bush Remedy
(106 x 81cms)

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
VAL NADIN

Bombsite
with rosebay willow herb
(96 X 96cms)
Rhonda Rettke

The Sentinels of the Bush
(85 x 70cms)
CHERYL MOODAI ROBINSON

The Doormat ~
availability subject to road kill
(91cm x 120cms)
JENNIFER ROLFE

Integration
(730 x 630cms)

CREATION STORY
CHRISTA SANDERS

Once upon a time I was a migrant
(190 x 106cms)

CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
ANNABELLE SOLOMON

The coincidence of opposites
(85 x 85cms)
ANNABELLE SOLOMON

Season of the Rose
(146 x 90cms)
DENISE TRENT

Influences

(120 x 105cms)
DIANA VINCENT

Strata I (69 x 95cms)
SUE WADEMAN

Into the Light
(58x 30cms)
LYN WARD

Belt # 1 (approx 30 x 5cms)
Belt # 2 (approx 30 x 5cms)
FIONA WRIGHT

The in breath binds…
the out unwinds…
(90 x 110cms)

CREATION STORY
FIONA WRIGHT

Fertile Valleys
(54 x 64cms)

CREATION STORY
END

Click here to return to the Directory of Exhibiting Artists
JUNE BROWN
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
JAN CLARK
CREATION STORY
MARION CURRY
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
and the worst of the winnowing winds
blew from the north east with heat.
MERRILYN GEORGE
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
LYN KABANOFF
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
LOANI LEE
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
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LYN WARD
CREATION STORY
THE EXHIBITIONS
LYN WARD
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
I had a happy childhood living on a farm in North East Victoria. My parents had little money to spare. My maternal Grandmother was a very resourceful and frugal person and her ingenuity fascinated me. She mended all belongings that needed mending. My own mother taught me to use all opportunities available and to care for family, friends and animals.

This spirit has also taught me not to be wasteful with food and to look after my belongings. The skill of darning and mending represents this care that lives in the background of my life, running through my childhood into my adult years. My quilt has been inspired by the spirit of Louisa Ellis, a true country woman, mother and wife. I like to think that this spirit of care and determination lives on in my life and in the life of my daughter as she faces the challenges of a young woman in Australia, today.

_A Hole! Darn it! I'll Mend it! (111 x 74cms)_
Cottons, wool and polyester fabrics, sashiko thread; hand and machine appliqué and quilting.
Sandra Burchill ~ Queensland

This quilt is composed of my personal symbols as a way of visualizing indigenous spirit. The symbols are things I have used regularly in the past or things that really please me. Much to my surprise you can walk into it as the curtain-like side pulls back to reveal a complex mysterious place. It takes time for us to find our sense of self and explore what gives us that identity, hence the title.

Waiting for Oneself (110 x 80cms)
Cottons, silk, synthetics; appliqué, couching; machine pieced and quilted
Yvonne Chapman ~ New South Wales

Through the age-old rhythm of the cloth, made up of the warp and the weft, I like to tell my stories. The textures of textiles, threads, vibrant pastels and paints excite me to express life’s daily passages, festivals and rituals. Gathering forever-treasured fabric pieces, wonderful threads, magical beads and shells to decorate with… I am still a nomad, wandering between heaven and earth. Enchanted by the colour, song and light of the day. Inspired by the mystery and stillness of the moon sky at night, and overwhelmed by the abundance of life in all its forms, I like to tread gently upon Mother Earth, and embrace her mystical cycles, where there is no beginning nor ending of time. I feel blessed and un-bound. By doing all those thousand stitches, like thoughtful footsteps, I reach deep down into the creative soul and reconnect with ancient timeless imagination, returning my offerings. There I feel a great joy, fulfillment and togetherness with old and emerging cultures and especially with all my sisters of the cloth, weaving wisely our sacred stories into the fabric of our daily lives.

Between Heaven and Earth (153 x 88cms)
Hand felted, cotton, silk woolen and metallic threads; beads, feathers, copperwire; collaged and hand embroidered
This is high summer, bushfire season, in my backyard. We live on a property in the beautiful Hunter Valley but in the dry times the bush becomes brittle and the light changes under the pall of smoke from the bushfires. Even though this situation makes me anxious it is part of the natural cycle of my environment and integral to my connection with the land I live in.

Hillside (orange) (106 x152cms)
The background is painted with dye and many hand dyed silks, velvets and voiles are applied to create the landscape
Marion Curry ~ Queensland

This textile is a visual representation of the barrier which has been preventing recognition of women as purveyors of cultural heritage through the visual arts. Not many people know the names of our female artists in any medium. However, gaps are now appearing as the barrier slowly crumbles and both new arrivals and old inhabitants of the land gradually come together to form a mutual culture where women are equally acknowledged and equally valued.

In time, perhaps, this new culture will also be strong enough to admit that, as the sea on both sides of the continent is the same, so people from all countries in the world are basically the same and a new indigenous society will be forged on this continent. And the barrier will disappear.

The Barrier (108 x 80cms)
Dye-painted, recycled noil silk and wool on Indian cotton backing; wool, silk and cotton threads; gold beads; hand and machine assembled
We are now discovering that the roots of our cultural myths are sometimes actually true. All over the world, what was once dismissed as improbable fantasy is being revealed by scientific discovery and what was once cultural legend is now known to be fact.

The old maps once read, "Here there be dragons". It’s true; here there really were dragons - dinosaurs used to graze just outside my window, an area which has been stripped bare for farming for the past 100 years or so. This leaves me free to invent my own inner landscapes and leaves me free to attach myself to this particular piece of Australia. Although there is no one who can tell me the answer, I wonder, is this what the dreamtime looked like?

Before We Came (75 x 54cms)
Over-dyed blanket; applied paint and silk; fern and buttonhole stitch in commercial and hand-dyed wool and cotton
Louise duVernet ~ New South Wales

This work illustrates my sense of multiplicity. Those of us who have no direct lines to a given area of land and associated culture will always be the product of pieces that are forced to fit. Life is a jigsaw puzzle with many unknown pieces that may never be discovered. We search for wholeness from the gifts that we receive from the people who enter and leave our lives.

I am thankful to Yalbalinga, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit at ACU, Mount Saint Mary Campus for sharing with me their sense of indigenous spirit, their longing for recognition as the owners of the land we call Australia, and their close ties to the land and all its creatures. My relationship to our land can only be as a foster-child. I am blessed by its offerings and nurtured by its warmth but I can never make claim to it as my own.

(continued over…)

THE EXHIBITIONS
The quilt is long and narrow much like my own physique. It shows a form that is structured at the base with symbolic knots for friendship and family ties. Different phases in my life are symbolised by new sections of puzzle that appear to have little connection to previous phases but in some way relate and allow for growth. The segmentation of later life is to increase the surface area of my persona to allow for greater exposure to what life offers, enriching the soul. The black background represents the desire to absorb all these experiences to enrich, unify and complete.

Making the pieces fit (150 x 50cms)
Contemporary double ikat, shot satin backed crepe, shot polyester twill, shot organza, leopard print pile knit, batik influenced print cotton, tulle, stretch lace, wrapping ribbon, stranded embroidery threads; applique, reverse applique, machine embroidery, sashiko and braidwork
My Czechoslovakian Grandma lives on through the colourful motifs she lovingly satin-stitched on tablecloths for me. These precious embroideries are part of my cultural heritage and have been re-fabricated to appear on my quilt. Traditional Slovak costume braids reinforce the female ancestral link.

Thanks Babicka (121 x 68cms)
Cotton fabric, cotton and rayon braids, oil sticks; machine pieced, hand stitched and quilted
I grew up in Newcastle near the beach. My father was a volunteer lifesaver and with his encouragement, and my love of water, I swam in the surf or the ocean baths almost every day of my childhood. Although I now live inland, water remains a fundamental part of my indigenous spirit. Along with many other Australians I make an annual pilgrimage to the ocean to pay homage.

Blue Waves (50 x 70cms)
Cottons with polyester batting; torn-strip collage, machine quilting
Merrilynn George ~ New Zealand

My work is about our Maori women and their importance in our society. The wharepuni (house) is built with the front bargeboards over the entrance symbolising the women’s legs being the place from which new life is produced. The house also has a backbone and ribs, and is a living entity, supported by Te Wairua (spiritual aspect). Our custom for visitors coming onto the marae (the area on which the houses stand) is that they are always first called on by a woman, and even if it is the man's place to speak, he does not do so until the women have acknowledged both the living and the dead.

My quilt speaks of the importance of the house to the growth of women and their place in building our society. The koru, reaching from the base is as the arms reaching up in glory to God the Creator for giving us such a rich and colourful place in the world. The koru is a recurring symbol in Maori art. My symbol comes from the ponga fern, which springs forth in growth despite being cut down, and is a reminder of the victory of the human spirit in adversity. My work is directly related to my experience of the environment – specifically a mountain-dominated landscape surrounded by thick forest and lively streams; Christian prayer, and my Maori life and people.

Koriora ki te Atua (Glory to God) (86 X 107cms)
Cottons and silks; wool batting; piecing and appliqué; machine and hand quilted and couched
Deni Gliddon ~ New South Wales

Since early childhood, I have been fascinated by the Cornucopia, Horn of Plenty, even before I knew its name. Likewise the making of the harvest thanksgiving displays in the local church, and the spectacular arrangements of fruit, vegetable and primary produce at the country shows. Now that I live in a busy city, traditional displays like this at the Royal Easter Show bring back treasured memories. On researching the Cornucopia symbol, I discovered that it is indeed ancient, and the goat's horn is a strong link to Capricorn, my birth sign that I share with my mother Valmae, and her grandfather, Alexander. The Cornucopia is seen to float in a sea of blue. To me, this represents our island continent Australia - a land of plenty with its ployglot mix of nationalities and indigenous cultural heritages.

Cornucopia - Horn of Plenty (80 x 95cms)
Hand dyed & commercial fabrics; free machine embroidery, and machine quilted
Alvina Hall ~ South Australia

Four little quilts on old worn blanket express something of the fate of Farina, a ghost town well north of Port Augusta. Originally named Government Gums, it thrived for a few short years of farming, before the normal climatic regime of constant drought, with the occasional exceptional wet season, became re-established. The population of about 500 quickly deserted, leaving ruins and rusting artifacts littering the bare sand and the gibber.

The Farina Series (4 Small quilts 100 x 124cms)
Manually digitized motifs lie under and over photo-transfers on well-worn sections of a denim shirt, stitched over old stained woolen blanket and backed with a cotton sheet, with hand applied checked textiles found at the site. Each little quilt has a photo transfer with the digital embroideries to do with farming and with civilized living. “Upholstery” (#3) includes a jacquard Thai silk upholstery sample swatch, photo of upholstery from a ruined car, and digital embroidery from an old fabric design. There is a counterpoint between the digital stitch, the free hand quilting, the machine made garment, and the hand made stitch.
This work metamorphoses the spirit of an idea in the form of an image of a face; from the indigenous origins of thought to a transparent form frozen in time somewhere between the thought and a tangible solid image. It is in the process of re-fabricating the invisible visible. There is a dream-like quality to the image. This piece moves away from the general direction of my work, which mostly explores a relationship with the land at a micro level rather than the macro.

Wave Length (192 x 204cms)
Lace, cottons, organza; machine stitched
Dianne Jones ~ New South Wales

‘Time on my Hands’.

Hands that reach across time/cultures/differentness as symbols of our common ancestry, that we are all indigenous to this earth.

‘Transformation Garment’.

Made for the recent Out of the Blue production of “Into the Woods”, this garment represents the expectation of change placed upon women throughout time, to conform to whatever is the current cultural norm of ‘good’ (acceptable) behaviour for females. The dark colours of the unacceptable mingle with hints of the glittering ‘good’ and acceptable amongst the everyday perceptions of appropriate behaviours. Such cultural conformity is indigenous to the history of women, in any age.

Time on my hands (67 x 103cms)
Cotton fabrics, hand painted and commercial; machine applique, hand quilted.

Transformation Garment
Cotton, wool, silk, polyester, fake fur, lurex; machine made and appliqued
I grew up in a conservative Scottish Presbyterian household where the dominant theme for behaviour was respectability. The females of the household were contained within narrow confines of respectability and behaviour through dress codes which did not draw attention to oneself. There was an inner craving to break out, for flamboyance and craziness. This became apparent when my mother organized the dressmaker to sew her ball gowns. The colours were brilliant and the fabrics exotic. I saved the scraps as a child because I loved them. My quilt is inspired by the extravagance and the wonderful textures of those ball gowns. It is also symbolic of myself breaking out as I grow older and wear whatever I choose, no longer confined by narrow views of respectability and conservatism.

Trocadero (52 x 70cms)
Dress off-cuts, wire and ribbon; fabric collage, machine embroidery and quilting
Loani Lee ~ Queensland

Just as painting is always about painting, quilting is always about quilting. The individual quilt defines where the maker is situated within the traditions and the timeline of the art. My position is that I have a firm foothold in tradition whilst endeavouring to push boundaries, the rationale being if you cannot envision the past you cannot anticipate the future. Abstract expressionism is my preferred style, therefore my starting point is usually an idea, an emotion or sometimes the formalist elements of colour and line. Then there is an evolvement and I keep making reference to the original idea or theme. If the quilt is a metaphor for life then the devolvement of the quilt into a new form while remembering its origins is refabricating the traditional and cultural spirit of quilting and because a quilt is a metaphor, re-inventing our own indigenous spirit.

Desire and Resistance (103 x 129cms)
Hand dyed cotton free cut; machine pieced and hand quilted
Karen Macpherson ~ New South Wales

Three part mixed media sculpture:

head (15 x 15 x 15cms);
boxed body (20 x 10 x 20ms);
limb tree (25 x 25 x 25cms)

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Clonella – Altered States
Porcelain doll parts, stretch lycra, wooden toggles, gold paint, beads, threads and wire, muslin strips and nylon used in wire armatures; wrapped and manipulated using hand stitching
Deborah McArdle ~ Victoria

My totem reflects the development of my life and art, from the ancestral roots and historical influences to the present time. It has become more colourful, complex and expansive, embracing more people, ideas, and issues, which have changed the shape of self and therefore my totem. Many connections are invisible, but are still helping me find my spirit, my place, my self.

Threads of Life (146 x 50cms)
Hand dyed and commercial cotton fabrics, painted wool fabrics, recycled synthetic fabrics; photos and photo transfers; machine and hand piecing; hand appliqué, embroidery and quilting; tatting, crochet, free-form knitting
Cynthia Morgan ~ Queensland

In the Outback Images series of quilts, I express my close affinity with our landscape. Landscapes continually change with erosion, the seasons and the weather conditions. After rain, the harsh nature of our landscape often appears softened. Plant growth flourishes in obscure places, fungi develop – and we look at the landscape with fresh eyes! I revisited this landscape and re-fabricated it with couched yarns and ribbons to signify some of the changes.

Outback Images III Revisted (125 x 90cms)
Hand-dyed cotton yarns, chenille velvet, velour, moiré taffeta, various commercial yarns and ribbon
Alison Muir ~ New South Wales

‘Ascending Purple’. It may not be indigenous here but yoga has given me a new lease on life and times, Achieving purple is the aim of all yoga practitioners.

‘Bush Remedy’. By coming in tune with my body through the assistance of bush flower essences I feel my spirit rise and wish to pay respect to the medium.

Ascending Purple (102 x 72cms)
Silk, polyester, lame; fused, machine quilting and applique

Bush Remedy (106 x 81cms)
Silk voile, cotton voile and polyesters; fused and machine stitched
I was born during WWII, and grew up in a city pockmarked with bombsites. We children didn't find this extraordinary - it was all we knew. Much fun was had playing on this euphemistically called "waste ground", especially in Birmingham's Bull Ring (the city centre market) where a bombshell remained to be clambered over. Many of these sites were left desolate for years and gradually became overgrown with weeds. But each summer tall colonies of vivid pink rosebay willow herb would reach skywards, brightening the otherwise dead landscape.

Hand dyed cottons and polyesters, leather and found objects, painting and computer printing; machine and hand pieced; hand embroidery
Rhonda Rettke ~ Queensland

The trees stand and watch over my land. Even when they have been burnt they continue to stand as if monuments to the past and the future. They are part of my life, tall and imposing, the sentinels of the bush.

The Sentinels of the Bush (85 x 70cms)
Assorted hand dyed and commercial fabrics; free machine embroidery onto machine pieced patches
Cheryl Moodai Robinson ~ New South Wales

I am a descendant of the Koamu clan of southwest Queensland. My artwork is based both on traditional and contemporary forms using a wide variety of media.

I travel the road and come across another road kill and as I collect the still body of the kookaburra, magpie, owl, kangaroo, possum, echidna or whatever, I give thanks and let the soul of the animal know how sorry I am that a human has once again left their footprint on the environment. I see the land and that which belongs to the land. Born to hear my ancestors teach me their knowledge of knowing and understanding the land and its inhabitants and as I tread lightly seeing and hearing their stories I discover/uncover more of my Indigenous soul.

The Doormat ~ availability subject to road kill (91cm x 120cms)
Cotton floor mat, textile paints, echidna quills and bones, blue tongue lizard bones, computer generated images
'Field biologists have long recognized that if an exotic species is introduced to a foreign environment it either adapts or dies. Those species that adapt usually do so to such an extreme that after a number of generations they may no longer even look like the original species, and if taken back to their host country will need to re-adapt to their original environment.' (Adele Getty – A Sense of the Sacred)

I believe that when we become rooted in a land, the land and all of its creatures including mineral, plant and animal and all ancestors – human and otherwise become available as teachers. I am transplanted to this continent, and I owe it to myself and future generations to honour that position. Within a global environment as it exists today I believe I cannot afford to feel displaced and disconnected from my homelands – both of them.

(continued over…)

Jennifer Rolfe ~ New South Wales
(continued)

I claim my current land as the place where my roots have been transplanted. With my heart and soul I will listen to the spirit of this land. But, I am constantly aware of my Welsh/Celtic origins and when I visit there I feel connected to that land as well.

The piece I created for the exhibition was my creative representation of this blending or integration of my roots. The Australian and Celtic landscape colours merge, sometimes blending, sometimes discordant. The felt fabric is created in colours of the Australian landscape and layers of hand dyed fabrics are placed behind it. By cutting through layers of fabrics glimpses of Celtic colours emerged. The frame is the structure that binds this blended persona together. The combination of felted and hand dyed cotton fabrics provided both textural and tonal contrasts.

Integration (730 x 630cms)
Hand felted, hand dyed fabrics machine pieced and quilted
Christa Sanders ~ ACT

Being a migrant I thought my indigenous spirit lost forever. The separation from my European ancestors brought a powerful realisation. After living in Australia for some time it seemed that I did not belong anywhere. Eventually it was in the 'belonging' I could reclaim my indigenous spirit. Working for this very personal belonging has become an ongoing process, made up of eight criteria. They are:

- the choice that I wanted to belong
- coming to terms with my past
- finding love for the land
- discovering peoples history before me
- receiving the gift of spiritual connection
- working for a social and safe economic connection
- gaining an insight to acceptance of difference
- and holding my dreams for the future

Belonging 2 (67 x 106cms)
Cottons machine pieced and hand quilted
This quilt is part of a series exploring belonging. A quilt 'Take the road to Red Hill' marked the beginning. Red Hill, a place real enough, but still floating, not anchored yet in my mind or heart. This imaginary landscape holds my history, social, geological and spiritual. The Red Hill has a place in this work. It has become a personal symbol of re-fabricating my indigenous spirit. A decision to migrate was taken very lightly many years ago. I had no understanding of the impact of such a major shift. A certain ignorance made the initial shock take on an air of adventure. With certainty this excitement featured highs and lows.

A migrant by definition starts as an outsider, like a fish out of water. Cultural heritage prevails even if it has been collected in a far away place. Today, still a migrant, with new connections and memories lived out mainly in and around Canberra, I have found the experience not alienating. I view my personal experiences as a combination of strengths I have available to spend. My story is a common one, an ancient one even, since migration itself shaped the world I live in today.

Once upon a time I was a migrant (190 x 106cms)
Cottons and hand painted fabrics; machine pieced, hand quilted
‘The Coincidence of Opposites’. The term applied to this quilt was coined by a Church cleric, Nicolas of Cusa. I interpret it as the process of searching for and finding that place/sensation which is the dynamic still point – the place of the Mystery, the Goddess, the God - however it is that one recognizes the interplay of the creative forces in the process of bringing into form.

As inheritor of Western European values and cultural perceptions it seems to be a case of choosing either/or. The best case scenario is a blending, which eliminates returning to the unifying experience of the source. Both approaches ignore the integration of opposites which inevitably occurs within the creative process. Earth’s seasonal cycles of creation are a template which ancient peoples recognized replicated in their own mini-cycles of birth, growth, death, decay and rebirth – creation out of destruction. The cycles are spirals of ever-changing constancy.

The coincidence of opposites (85 x 85cms)
An installation in 2 parts: wall hanging from various fabrics, machine pieced and stitched
Annabelle Solomon ~ New South Wales

‘Season of the Rose’. My Jewish ancestors were deported from London and arrived in Van Dieman’s Land in 1823. For me as sixth generation descendant, stories of loss and separation have given place to a full-bloom belonging in this South Land. The symbolism of the rose is shared by many cultures, representing eros (its anagram) - Greek for ‘life force’. My quilt images reconciliation blossoming between peoples, by which all who live in this island home realise a deep connection to each other and the land, a connectedness which crosses borders and boundaries.

Season of the Rose (146 x 90cms)

Thai raw silk, hand dyed and commercial cottons, machine pieced and quilted; cruciate stencil on back of quilt
Denise Trent ~ New South Wales

I am influenced by the textile traditions of all world cultures. This work is a blending of indigenous fabrics of the Asia-Pacific region. Because of Australia's unique position in this region we are able to visit and experience many different cultures. Multiculturalism has influenced our lives and traditions in many positive ways...food, religion, design, fashion, music. The more we are open to the influences of other cultures, the more enriched our lives will be.

Influences (120 x 105cms)
Cotton and synthetic fabrics from Indonesia, the Cook Islands and Fiji; machine pieced, hand quilted and appliquéd
When first arriving in a new land as an immigrant, there is no sense of place or belonging. Having left behind your motherland you arrive in a country where you feel you have no roots. As a woman with a family it is up to you to establish that place where once more everyone feels they belong. After more than thirty years Australia is now my motherland. The earth beneath my feet is my place and the feeling of belonging is complete. Strata 1 attempts to evoke the way I see the drama and timelessness of the colours of my place.

Strata I (69 x 95cms)
Hand dyed and commercial cottons; bonded appliqué; machine piecing, quilting and embroidery
How can we authentically visualise our indigenous spirit? On contemplating this question and reading the essay entitled re-fabricating 2002 - our own indigenous spirit written by Annabelle Solomon for the newsletter of the Ozquilt Network (#43 March 2002), I realized that the small textile image I had already begun work on was attempting to do just that.

It started out with the title of Self Portrait. The movement of the curved shape towards the light, the horizon lines which I have been consistently part of my recent landscape works, and the choice of colours, misty and metallic, form layers of a process, and a personality. My work is deeply personal, as I seek the Source of my indigenous spirit and how it might be imaged. By seeking the Divine in a restored form of Christianity, and using the power of imagination, I long to create images that change people’s perceptions by working magic.

Into the Light (58x 30cms)
Hand painted cottons and silks; metallic threads; binding hand painted by Anne Barwood using acrylics; machine and hand stitched
Lyn Ward ~ New South Wales

My feminine cyclic wisdom is part of my indigenous self, the process of entering more and more the unfolding and expression of my authentic self, my soul’s purpose. Working my collected pieces of fabric, and those of other women who hand dye them by stitching, folding and tying patterns. I combine these hand dyed with commercial fabrics and a range of collected items.

‘Hip Art’ is for enjoyment and celebration. Both women and men like to wear my belts. Ceremony and ritual are the ancient reminders of the sacred meeting of spirit and body as connection to place, space and land. Recent ways of creating ritual have ancient connections. A young woman initiated into her own journey of feminine mystery will experience her innate wisdom and healing nature. Menopause is a continuation of the same journey “tying together threads that create the magnificent tapestry of woman’s wholeness’ (Hormone Hersey, 2001, publisher: Sellman). My indigenous self is my authentic self, and ‘Hip art’ is a way to celebrate this.

Belt # 1 (approx 30 x 5cms)  Belt # 2 (approx 30 x 5cms)
Found objects; hand dyed fabrics using indigo and natural dyes with shibori techniques, made by “Magpie Indigo” (Loret Runagell and Wendy Pepper)
Fiona Wright ~ New South Wales

‘The in breath binds…the out unwinds’. The landscape with its many shapes and textures, resonates to me of our inner life. The two lines from a poem by Hammering, which is the title of this work, opened out into a contemplation of view. Depending on focus – places, events, people can elicit different responses. The stitches, like steps, chart the courses of our inner wonderings/wanderings – sometimes we experience that feeling of going over the same landscape time and again, then we can suddenly change our focus and sail free.

The in breath binds…the out unwinds…(90 x 110cms)
Wool felted onto gauze (nuno), hand-dyed, and appliquéd onto cotton backing and embroidered with various threads
Fiona Wright ~ New South Wales

‘Fertile Valleys’. One of a series I’ve called Life Topography. Studying maps for a hiking trip the change of colours on the topographical map led to the realization that much of our inner life is also linked to our outer location /existence. We are all somewhat like a mountain: insular, separate but just as our emotional life flows around us, where it moves streams of life arise, and so connections are formed through fertile valleys with other mountains.

Fertile Valleys (54 x 64cms)
Wool felted onto gauze (nuno), hand-dyed, and appliquéd onto cotton backing and embroidered with various threads
Quilts created in the process of re-visioning

The Wheel of the Year
for the southern hemisphere

A RETROSPECTIVE
of the works of Australian contemporary textile artist
Annabelle Solomon
The Sabbats are the eight points in which we connect the inner and the outer cycles: the interstices where the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative, and the personal meet. As we enact each drama in its time, we transform ourselves. We are renewed, we are reborn even as we decay and die. We are not separate from each other, from the broader world around us; we are one with the Goddess, with the God.

As the Cone of Power rises as the season changes, we arouse the power from within, the power to heal, the power to change our society, the power to renew the earth.

Starhawk, (1989)
Art has the potential to reconfigure our intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual orientation in the world. (Gablik, 1992 p. 93)

In working creatively with textiles I am developing a deeper personal understanding of how the visual arts profoundly influence the beliefs by which we live – that visual representations of what is generally called ‘reality’ have the power to profoundly affect a worldview. Art is inherently about creativity (rather than ‘re-production’), it is a process more than a product., for both artist and viewer. The process of making art provides the space for the exploration of a reflexive relationship between inner and outer worlds, the now and then, imagining a ‘bigger picture’. Within this framework the role of the artist may be considered sacred. The real becomes so by being imagined. It is by means of this process that artistic creation and social change occur in cyclic reciprocity. Art is a profoundly political and religio/spiritual act – holding special potential for women in contemporary culture by means of expression through the fabric medium.

The motivation for my artwork is in recognising environmental and social conditions which point to the need to re-imagine our relationship to the Earth and each other as one of immanent connection and interdependence: towards developing a new ecology of consciousness. Such a relationship could be considered spiritual - one which embodies the indigenous spirit working with nature on nature’s terms.
I sense that our forebears felt such a connection to their environment and social group, which has come down to us through their art, stories and religious celebrations, many of which need unravelling. Encouraging re-newed perceptions through art may offer the chance for a new way of responding - awakening a new/old response-ability to the environmental destruction and social disintegration which seems to be threatening our well-being and possibly our continuance as a human species.

The quilts become forms which seek to elicit a sense of ancient wisdoms transposed via the visual medium as relevant for our times. The artworks form a bridge to forgotten sensibilities, which remain attainable today. My quilts embody a personal awareness of the flux between continuity and change - in particular, the process of synchronising the transposition of a European cultural heritage to the southern hemisphere. They thereby create cultural story in continuity with the old heritage whilst forming new ties to this South Land of my birth. The visual representation of these concepts is often by means of the combination of a traditional block or style, which is applied in tandem with contemporary forms of construction and design.

The initial creation of 8 quilts created to mark the festival days of the old European and Celtic calendar known as *The Wheel of the Year* particularly exemplify this process. Exhibited together, they form an installation to the sacred process of creation seen in the annual cycle of Earth around Sun, and were created as integral to the presentation for a research Masters thesis as recorded in a book entitled *Seasons of the Soul: the Wheel of the Year in Quilts*(1999).
The quilts often contain symbolic elements of contemporary Earth-centred spiritual perceptions, re-emerging from origins in the ancient myths of indigenous peoples of northern Europe; they are sacred stories which have come down to us through our current religious and social traditions, the origins of which having been mostly forgotten. Such stories evoke memories of ‘the mysticism of the land itself that goes beyond the country’s political and economic needs – a love of the Earth itself, respect for its intrinsic worth’ (Gablik).

These underlying principles continued to influence my work in developing a body of art quilts for my PhD by exploring and re-visioning a feminist spiritual and creative imaginary, experienced and reflected on through the process of creating quilts for the Wheel of the Year in the Southern Hemisphere. I am committed to exploring through my creative quilt making, the connections between one of women’s oldest art forms and the active development of social and cultural theory in the contemporary Australian context.

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Cathedral Windows (1999)
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Ages of Woman: Maiden, Mother and Crone (1999)
a250x200cms
Season of the Quickening (1999)
138x94cms
Beltane Fires (1999)
125x110cms
Bush Blanket (1999)
177x118 cms
Horizons in Time:
Past, Present and Future (2000)
50x37cms
Season of the Rose (2000)
146x90cms
Vernal Equinox – spring blooms (2001)
91x145cms
The Coincidence of Opposites (2002)
85x85cms
The Memory of Water (2003)
94x55cms
END

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THE EXHIBITIONS
CREATION STORY

THE EXHIBITIONS
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Cathedral Windows

Most fine evenings, as the sun sinks behind the ridge of mountains to the west, the glow which slowly spreads across the sky sets my heart singing with the majesty and wonder of our planet’s daily journey, and her kindness in bringing the dark so that we can see a different aspect of her beauty at night - and, thankfully, take a rest. Her movements set the rhythm of daily life, and provide inspiration for my quilt making.

Formed as a diptych to simulate the long narrow windows of Gothic cathedrals and churches, the quilt images the consciousness of our early ancestors, who gathered in sacred groves as their place of ritual worship to the mystery they acknowledged being enacted in their daily lives – under the archway formed by the branches and the canopy of endless sky. Theirs was an imaginary of intimate connection to Earth’s processes of creation through destruction.

Hand-dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted; screen print by Sue Swanson
Ages of Woman: Maiden, Mother and Crone

The three phases of women’s lives are imaged here through the three bowls or vessels, using traditional colours: white for the virgin, red for the blood of the mother, and black for knowledge of the Mystery which often brings life’s most salient lessons. The vessels symbolise women’s bodies, understood from earliest times as the primary sacred vessel, giving life and receiving it back in death for a renewal of life.

Each stage of a woman’s life, the wisdom of the crone, the dependability of the mother, the autonomy of the maiden, contains elements of the other two. As life-giving waters flow from one vessel into another, so do the qualities by which women experience transformation in all stages of life. Woman’s story has most often been recorded via the use of cloth. Working with fabric gives me a strong sense of connection to the women who have gone before, as well as those to come.

Variety of fabric types machine pieced and shaped
Season of the Quickening

As the southern half of our planet starts to turn back towards the Sun after the longest night at Winter Solstice, the bush wattles respond with an ever-growing display of pale and vibrant yellows. It is a sign that life forming energies are returning, bringing reassurance and joy, as do the first-felt movements of new life growing in the womb. This quilt is one in a series of ‘window quilts’, and combines conventional ‘stripping’ and innovative free-cutting techniques to evoke a sense of both continuity and change felt in the cycle of Earth’s seasonal expressions.

Hand-dyed cottons machine pieced and quilted
Beltane Fires

The bountiful beauty of the Blue Mountains National Park is reflected by the fiery energy of the ancient escarpments at sunsets. Blessed to live within easy access of this unique and wonderful wilderness, the magic of these cliffs as the sun sets constantly reminds me of the fragile heritage which is ours to both take care of and to enjoy.

Hand-dyed cottons machine stripped; reverse applique, machine quilted
Bush Blanket

This quilt borders on the traditional bed quilt in size (and is sometimes used as such), though the blocks are formed from a ‘free cut’ template. Perhaps it is reminiscent of the Australian ‘waggas’, not only in theme, but also in that the back is made from used flour sacks that have been mono-printed with gum leaves. The three layers depict a typical bush scene, from the leaf litter to the expanse of cloud-studded blue skies.

Australian designed cotton fabrics; cotton batting; monoprinted flour sacks.
Horizons in Time: Past, Present and Future

The horizon is the meeting place of two realms: the solid and tangible presence of earth, and the seeming empty and unknown nothingness of sky - a place which may be conceptualised as that point where two lips meet in reciprocity to engage in creative exchange. It is a shifting place of mystery where the past and future meet in the present to continually form and re-form our understanding of ourselves in relation to our place in the world.

As inspiration for quilt making, the ancient escarpments of the Blue Mountains elicit in me the awe and beauty of the mystery of all creation.

Hand-dyed cottons, machine pieced and quilted; silk backing
Season of the Rose

My Jewish ancestors were deported from London and arrived in Van Dieman’s Land in 1823. For me as sixth generation descendent, stories of loss and separation have given place to a full-bloom belonging in this South Land. I am nevertheless aware of the impact immigration has had on original tribal cultures, causing hardship and displacement in turn.

The symbolism of the rose is shared by many cultures, representing eros (its anagram meaning lust for life) - Greek for ‘life force’. The rose patches on the back of the quilt are the four corners of the globe from which people have come to Australia, joined by the cruciate symbol in the centre, another ancient symbol which celebrates the unity found in diversity. My quilt images reconciliation blossoming between peoples, by which all who live in this island home realise a deep connectedness to each other and the land, a connectedness which recognizes at the same time as crossing borders and boundaries.

The rose is symbol of life’s passion to renew itself in beauty and strength, fragility and endurance, through the endless cycles of destruction and creation. It honours the 15 billion years of creation, when this numinous energy flared forth to unfold its desire for the creation of the Universal, in which we participate. It is icon to this continual blossoming through the body and blood of woman - a cross-cultural icon representing the sacred vulva, or yoni, as the seat of and gateway from which all life arises. The rose is sacred emblem to Goddesses in many cultures, expressing desire for union with the Mystery that is Life through sexual union.

Thai raw silks, hand-dyed and commercial cottons machine pieced and quilted; cruciate stencil on back
Vernal Equinox ~ spring blooms

This spring window quilt was inspired by the wonderful variety of wattle and the extravaganza of flowers to be seen at the season of rebirth. In spite of their differences – some displaying warm, gentle colours, others boldly blazing forth, they blend and meld into an exuberant welcome to life’s renewal.

Satins, hand-dyed and commercial cottons, machine pieced and quilted
The Coincidence of Opposites

This quilt is a mandala for contemplation on the spirals of ever-changing constancy brought witnessed in Earth’s seasonal cycles. It refers to a term used by mid 15th century mystical cleric, Nicolas of Cusa, to describe his experience of the Divine. For me, it refers to the integration of opposites inevitably occurring within the creative process, Earth’s seasons forming a template for the interaction between light and dark, destruction and renewal, which coincide in the sacred act of creation. It is an experience of that place/sensation which is the dynamic still point – the place of the Mystery, the Goddess, the God - however it is that one gives recognition to the interaction of creative forces as Source in the process of bringing All-that-is into form.

As inheritor of Western European values and cultural perceptions it seems to be a case of choosing either/or. The best-case scenario is a blending, which eliminates returning to the unifying experience of the source. Both of these approaches ignore the integration of opposites as occurring within the creative process. Earth’s seasonal cycles of creation are a template recognised by our forebears as replicated in their own mini-cycles of birth, growth, death, decay and rebirth – creation out of destruction. The cycles are spirals of ever-changing constancy. (This quilt may be hung all four sides.)

An installation in 2 parts; wall-hanging from various fabrics, machine pieced and quilted
The Memory of Water

One of the four sacred elements, water has the power to effect personal transformation and take us into the realms of mystery through our shared memories. Ritually water is often used for purifications and blessings, and in initiations, with the perceived power to effect personal transformation and take us into its enchanted mystery by sharing some of its memories. What memories do we share with water?

Tidal waters remember the pull of the moon on a daily basis, and menstrual waters the moonflow of women’s blood cycles. Subterranean waters remember the power of the dark, while uterine waters remember the source of life! Water remembers the feeling of flying with the clouds, of carving flowing courses across the land, and of becoming frozen into solid shapes; of being more exuberant and sparse! The more I contemplated the memory of water, the more fathomable this little quilt became, as the words became fabric!

I am the tides that fall and rise in rhythm to the pull of Moon and Sun, the streams of red moon flow, veins of life echoed in the fragile glimmer of a rainbow and warm subterranean caverns of darkness.
Hearing the silent communion and the screams of delight
I am the whiteness of mountain heights, and in the cresting waves.
I am clouds of strata, cumulus, nimbus flying across land and sea Resisting and surrendering to each transformation of my journey.
I am the memory of water.

Hand-dyed cottons machine pieced; reverse quilted by machine